Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

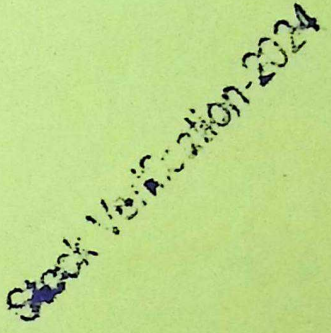
BIOGRAPHY
Vol. 23 2000 No. 1-2

GKV Lib
Hardwar

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

07 90 61
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# biography

*an interdisciplinary quarterly*

079061

## THE BIOPIC

*guest editor* GLENN MAN

079061

57

Vol. 23
2000

No 1-2

31/3/2001

GURUKUL KANGRI Vishwavidyalaya
HARIDWAR

Sue Tweg

Thomas Doherty

Clifford Marks &
Robert Torry

T. Hugh Crawford

Margaret D. Stetz

James Burns

George F. Custen

Mikita Brottman

Audrey Levasseur

Lucy Fischer

Alana Bell

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

23 . number 1 . winter 2000

*biography* *an interdisciplinary quarterly*
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

FOUNDING EDITOR, *Biography* AND DIRECTOR EMERITUS,
CENTER FOR BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH
George Simson

EDITOR
Craig Howes

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Stanley Schab

LITERARY EDITOR
Miriam Fuchs

REVIEWS AND REVIEWED ELSEWHERE EDITOR
Marie-José Fassiotto

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Jeanette Smith

BIBLIOGRAPHERS
Phyllis Wachter
William Todd Schultz

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I PRESS LIAISONS
Joel Bradshaw
Lori A. Kozey

Published by the University of Hawai'i Press for the Biographical Research Center.
©2000 by the Biographical Research Center. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the U.S.A.
ISSN 0162-4962

---

# The Biographical Research Center

is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization incorporated in the State of Hawai'i to support research, study, discussion, and dissemination of information about lifewriting. Its governing officers and Board of Directors are

PRESIDENT
Craig Howes

VICE PRESIDENT
Miriam Fuchs

SECRETARY
Glenn D. Paige

DIRECTORS
Eden Elizabeth Hifo
James Marsh
George Simson
Marguerite Simson

---

# The Center for Biographical Research

of the College of Languages, Linguistics, and Literature of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary and multicultural study of lifewriting.

In conjunction with the Department of English, the CBR offers thesis advising for Ph.D. and M.A. projects, and graduate and undergraduate courses in lifewriting. A B.A. in biography is offered through the Liberal Studies Program, and the Biography Prize is offered annually for the best work on any aspect of lifewriting by a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Hawai'i.

In addition to *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly,* in publication since 1978, the CBR sponsors the Biography Monograph series.

The CBR also maintains a library and resource collection, hosts international conferences and visiting scholars, and conducts a public seminar series.

For further information, please contact the director, Craig Howes, at biograph@hawaii.edu, or at the Center for Biographical Research, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822 USA.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*biography*

*an interdisciplinary quarterly*

23.1 • Winter 2000

# The Biopic

Editor's Introduction
*Guest Editor Glenn Man* v

Articles

*Sue Tweg*
Not the Full Story: Representing Ruth Ellis 1

Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in Britain, lingers in the popular imagination in two films, the fictional *Yield to the Night* (1956) and the Ellis biopic *Dance with a Stranger* (1985). This article examines how the film medium reworks biographical details to shape and define Ellis herself, her fictional alter ego, and two female film stars.

*Thomas Doherty*
Malcolm X: In Print, On Screen 29

In 1992, the Malcolm X of the printed page ceded pride of place, at least temporarily, to the Malcolm X of the motion picture screen, *Malcolm X,* Spike Lee's reverent biopic, challenged the Hollywood tradition, but the biopic also threatened the status of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* Yet the media face-off between the two images of Malcolm X—the literary creation and the motion picture version—indicated that even in an incessantly visual culture, a portrait in literature can outlive a depiction in film.

*Clifford Marks and Robert Torry*
"Herr Direktor": Biography and Autobiography in *Schindler's List* 49

Our essay explores the role of biography and autobiography in *Schindler's List.* By autobiography, we mean how the film metaphorically tells the story of Steven Spielberg through the story of Oskar Schindler. Spielberg unconsciously invokes autobiography to write biography and history. This invocation is the palimpsest over which *Schindler's List* is produced.

*T. Hugh Crawford*
Glowing Dishes: Radium, Marie Curie, and Hollywood 71

This paper discusses the cultural power of images of science and scientists produced by film biography. Using Mervyn LeRoy's *Madame Curie* as an example, it charts the remarkable symmetry between some recent feminist critiques of science and some versions of feminist film theory, particularly in relation to notions of enlightenment, objectification, and identity.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*Margaret D. Stetz*
Oscar Wilde at the Movies: British Sexual Politics and *The Green Carnation* (1960) 90

Representations of the life of Oscar Wilde have served diverse political ends in the twentieth century. In 1960, following the "Wolfenden Report," two British biopics used Wilde's story to argue for decriminalizing male homosexuality. *The Green Carnation,* in particular, presented Wilde as a sympathetic gay Everyman, but also erased much of what had made him a challenge to the straight Victorian bourgeoisie.

*James Burns*
Biopics and Politics: The Making and Unmaking of the Rhodes Movies 108

Since 1916 seven organizations have tried to make a "biopic" abut the controversial South African imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. However politicians in Southern Africa and Britain undermined all but two of the projects, and tried to influence the two "biopics" that were actually made. When screened, both films inspired a heated public debate about Rhodes and his legacy.

*George F. Custen*
The Mechanical Life in the Age of Human Reproduction: American Biopics, 1961–1980 127

This essay continues where *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* left off. It examines the cultural context of Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s, and charts how a number of changes—in attitudes toward fame outside the entertainment industry, in the personnel who ran Hollywood, and in the rise of TV—affected how post-studio Hollywood constructed public history.

*Mikita Brottman*
"Everybody Loves Somebody": The A&E "Rat Pack" Biographies 160

This analysis of the recent A&E Biography© series on the Rat Pack studies the ways in which the series tends to shun the contemporary model of the voyeuristic celebrity narrative, and instead attempts to create a mass fantasy of the happiness of mythical pasts. The article analyzes the standard formulaic features of the A&E Biography©, which include a veneration and a magnification so extreme as to actually rewrite history.

*Audrey Levasseur*
Film and Video Self-Biographies 176

This article introduces, defines, and examines self-biographies, a cinematic hybrid form that combines the traits of biography and autobiography. By surveying several important early examples of celebrity self-biography, the essay chronicles important characteristics of the subgenre, and calls attention to a potential weakness of the form. The essay assesses not only how the celebrity-subject's performance impacts on the director, but also how

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the director's choices affect the complexity of the treatment. The conclusion probes issues of non-celebrity self-biography.

90 *Lucy Fischer*
*Marlene:* Modernity, Mortality, and the Biopic 193

One of the major genres in Hollywood is the so-called "biopic," and, frequently, such films have focused on the life of a well-known actress: Gertrude Lawrence, Frances Farmer, or Susan Hayward, for instance. Just as recent cinema has re-worked genres like the western and the musical (in films like *Silverado* or *Pennies from Heaven*), so the biopic is subject to modernist or postmodernist elaboration. This is the project of Maximilian Schell's experimental biopic *Marlene* (1983)—which seeks to examine the life and career of Marlene Dietrich. Frustrating Schell's desire, however, is 108 the fact that, although she commissioned the film, Dietrich refuses to appear in it, leaving the filmmaker/biographer to deal with only photographs and archival film footage. Nonetheless, this highly self-reflexive work raises questions about the nature of biography, the relationship between cinema and death, and the ontology of the film medium.

*Alana Bell*
Biopic Bibliography 212

An annotated list of books, articles, and dissertations on the biopic.

127 REVIEWS

*Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing,* by Suzette Henke 223
*Reviewed by E. Ann Kaplan*

*Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye,* by Barbie Zelizer 231
*Reviewed by Caroline Wiedmer*

160 *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women's Auto/Biographical Film in Postwar Germany,* by Susan E. Linville 235
*Reviewed by Jans B. Wager*

*Sacred Biographies in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia,* edited by Juliane Schober 239
*Reviewed by Jacob N. Kinnard*

176 *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature,* edited by Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild 242
*Reviewed by Dwight F. Reynolds*

*Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America,* by Scott E. Casper 245
*Reviewed by Norma Basch*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History,* edited by Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice 247
*Reviewed by Nathalie Cooke*

*Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing,* by James Olney 251
*Reviewed by G. Thomas Couser*

*Men of Letters, Writing Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography in the Late Victorian Period,* by Trev Lynn Broughton 254
*Reviewed by Herbert Sussman*

*Gay Lives: Homosexual Autobiography from John Addington Symonds to Paul Monette,* by Paul Robinson 257
*Reviewed by Jim Brogan*

*Facing It: AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author,* by Ross Chambers 260
*Reviewed by Julien S. Murphy*

REVIEWED ELSEWHERE 264
Excerpts from recent reviews of biographies, autobiographies, and other works of interest

LIFELINES 301
Upcoming events, call for papers, and news from the field

CONTRIBUTORS 304

*Biography* is a member of CEJJ the Council of Editor of Learned Journals.

Articles appearing in *Biography* are annotated and indexed in *America: History and Life;* the *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature; Arts and Humanities Citations Index; Historical Abstracts; The MLA International Bibliography; Uncover;* and *The Year's Work in English Studies.*

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standards for Information Sciences—Permanence of paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# *biography*

*an interdisciplinary quarterly*

23.2 • Spring 2000

EDITOR'S NOTE iii

ARTICLES

*Evelyn J. Hawthorne*
Self-Writing, Literary Traditions, and Post-Emancipation Identity: The Case of Mary Seacole 309

This study addresses the virtually unexplored topic of how first generation, free(d) Caribbean subjects constructed their identities from the conflictual heritages in the post-Emancipation period. Focusing on the nineteenth-century work *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands,* the author explores its meanings in the contexts of Victorian literary traditions, ideological discourses, and Caribbean history.

*Michael Keren*
Biography and Historiography: The Case of David Ben-Gurion 332

Because the history of the Jewish people in the modern era often takes the form of life writing by or about David Ben-Gurion, changes in Israeli historiography can be tracked by observing changes in the biographical literature on Ben-Gurion. In outlining those transformations, this article provides a conceptual framework and typology for analyzing the relationship between biographical and historiographical change, and examines biography's role in a society's evolving self-consciousness about its history.

*S. Leigh Matthews*
"The Bright Bone of a Dream": Drama, Performativity, Ritual, and Community in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* 352

In a reading of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) which stresses the communal identity of the autobiographical subject, this essay makes a connection between the function of life writing in modern society and that of ritual in primitive societies. The memoir form in particular is thus viewed as a tool used by marginalized individuals to achieve a public performance—a public rite of passage—as a means to reintegrate the self within communal origins and to provide critical reflection on limited Western concepts of subjectivity and historiography.

REVIEWS

*Momentous Events, Vivid Memories,* by David Pillemer 372
*Reviewed by Kathryn A. Becker and Jennifer J. Freyd*

*Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters,* edited by Catherine M. Mooney 375
*Reviewed by Brigitte Cazelles*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography,* by Jo-Ann Pilardi 379
*Reviewed by Barbara Klaw*

*Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists,* by Martha Watson 384
*Reviewed by Wendy S. Hesford*

*Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938,* by Barbara Green 389
*Reviewed by Ann D. Gordon*

*The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England,* by Amanda Vickery 391
*Reviewed by Linda V. Troost*

*To Live at the Center of the Moment: Literary Autobiographies of Aging,* by Barbara Frey Waxman 393
*Reviewed by Teresa Mangum*

*Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography,* by Diane Bjorklund 396
*Reviewed by Katherine Adams*

*Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith & Image,* by Erika Doss 400
*Reviewed by Lynda Goldstein*

*Race Men: The W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures,* by Hazel V. Carby 403
*Reviewed by Daniel Boamah-Wiafe*

*African American Pioneers in Anthropology,* edited by Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison 407
*Reviewed by B. C. Harrison*

*Biography and Education: A Reader,* edited by Michael Erben 415
*Reviewed by Hephzibah Roskelly*

REVIEWED ELSEWHERE 418
Excerpts from recent reviews of biographies, autobiographies, and other works of interest

LIFELINES 472
Upcoming events, calls for papers, and news from the field

CONTRIBUTORS 476

*Biography* is a member of CELJ the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.

*Biography* is a member of the *Project* MUSE® Online Scholarly Journals database.

Articles appearing in *Biography* are annotated and indexed in *America: History and Life;* the *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature; Arts and Humanities Citations Index; Historical Abstracts; The MLA International Bibliography; Uncover;* and *The Year's Work in English Studies.*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

379

384

389

391

393

396

400

403

407

415

418

472

476

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

GLENN MAN

Major work on the biopic begins with Carolyn Anderson's 1988 bibliographical essay, which treats the genre chronologically as a reflection of the ideologies of the times from the 1930s onward. George F. Custen's landmark 1992 *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* surveys the Hollywood biopic up to 1960. Dennis Bingham's anticipated study of post-studio era film biography is currently under contract with Rutgers University Press, and as Alana Bell's annotated bibliography in this issue makes clear, important individual essays and dissertations have appeared from time to time. But this rich and various genre deserves more textual and contextual analysis than it has hitherto received, and this special issue of *Biography* is a contribution to the development of this discourse.

Perhaps one reason why this genre has lagged behind other genres in film studies is that biopics have been so much a part of other film genres that they inevitably serve more as illustrations for those other kinds of movies. Though pervasive within the industry, the biopic is often seen first as a western, a musical, a war film, a gangster film, a woman's film, a melodrama, an historical epic, or film noir. Treating the biopic as a genre in itself therefore becomes as problematic as treating the biopic as depicting the life itself. Just as it is not real life but *reel* life—a representation, a fictionalized or interpretive treatment—so too it is often a film about film, as the life gets folded into, repeats, and transforms the narrative patterns and conventions of other genres and larger schools of narrative such as classical Hollywood cinema. A biopic's production will often take its cue from the cultural/political attitudes of the time, from the philosophy and hallmarks of a particular studio or filmmaker, or even from the personae of its stars.

In other words, a biopic is a mythic expression in which several textual and contextual factors often play a part. If, for example, we look at *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), we see that it is not only a biopic, but a gangster film as

*Annual*
*torical*


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

well, and that the majority of the general public viewed it and remember it as a gangster film. The film also incorporates the standard Hollywood plot patterns of work and romance by playing up the intersection of crime and love in the relationship between Bonnie and Clyde. Furthermore, the film turned out to be a star vehicle for Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, to say nothing about its inspired co-stars Gene Hackman, Estelle Parsons, and Michael J. Pollard; and *Bonnie and Clyde* mirrors the Zeitgeist of its time by depicting its protagonists as heroes rebelling against the system, coming as it did at the height of the counterculture movement, the Vietnam war protests, and the Civil Rights agitation. And finally, the film comments on the mythmaking influence of the media in its references to photographs, newspaper headlines and articles, and Hollywood movies and stars of the 1930s. It should not be surprising, then, that director Arthur Penn would say in an interview after the film was made, that "I don't think the original Bonnie and Clyde are very important except insofar as they motivated the writing of a script and our making of the movie" (7).

A biopic then is not so much a film about a life as it is a film about competing and intersecting discourses, with the life itself being simply one of those discourses that is transformed by the work of the others. A film about Wyatt Earp, for example, is tangentially about the historical Earp, but it is really about the western genre. Certain patterns of this genre dictate departures from historical accuracy. One such pattern is that of the individual versus the community, which contrasts the western hero's rugged individualism and relation to the wilderness to community, marriage, and civilization. The conflict is between the integrity of the individual and the pull toward integration into the community, and both sides are empowered in the western. The hero usually saves the community from the outlaws, and so allows civilization to advance and flourish, but at the same time, he retains his rugged individualism by rejecting marriage and riding away from the community and toward the frontier, from whence he appeared at the beginning. But following this conventional pattern in a western biopic such as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) necessarily distorts the historical facts of Earp's career. We know that in real life, Earp not only married, but married twice. And yet the mythic Wyatt Earp appearing in *My Darling Clementine* remains the westerner who feels ambivalent toward marriage because of the pull of the frontier, which customarily prevails. The final scene is that classic rendering of the western hero's choice. Henry Fonda's Wyatt Earp gallops towards the horizon and away from his darling Clementine, who stands by the wooden fence that borders the town of Tombstone.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


The essays in this collection reveal the diversity of discourses that intersect in the production and reception of the biopic. Their writers also testify to the variety and elasticity of a genre that encompasses not only other fictional film genres, but the documentary, video self-biographies, television docudramas, and other hybrid forms as well. The first three articles focus on the ways in which three mainstream biopics represent a life on film through a variety of lenses that mythologize a historical figure for the viewing public—in this case, Ruth Ellis, Malcolm X, and Oskar Schindler, respectively. Sue Tweg's "Not the Full Story: Representing Ruth Ellis" shows how the elements of pulp fiction, melodrama, and film noir interweave in the narrative of *Dance with a Stranger,* the 1985 biopic about the notorious British murderess hanged in 1955 for killing her playboy boyfriend. Tweg also discusses *Yield to the Night* (1956), the Diana Dors film that the public related to the Ellis scandal, trial, and execution going on simultaneously with its making and release. Tweg explores the inflections that Diana Dors and Miranda Richardson bring to the Ellis representation, not only in their performances but also in their physical appearances, and in the case of Dors especially, in their personal and professional lives as well. Thomas Doherty's "Malcolm X: In Print, On Screen" places Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992) in the context not only of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* cowritten with Alex Haley, but also of *The Hate that Hate Produced,* the Mike Wallace 1959 TV series on the Nation of Islam, and the 1972 documentary also titled *Malcolm X.* Doherty argues that the Lee biopic's reverent treatment and history-lesson tone are less effective in constructing a mythic African American hero than the searingly passionate *Autobiography.* Along the way, Doherty also shows how Lee's film is at one and the same time a revision of the condescension and white control of the biopics of African Americans of the 1950s, and an aping of the Hollywood hagiopics of the 1930s and 1940s. Clifford J. Marks' and Robert Torry's "'Herr Direktor': Biography and Autobiography in *Schindler's List*" sees the 1993 biopic as a reflection of its director Steven Spielberg—his moral intent in making the film surely, but also, and more interestingly, his own life and personality as it parallels Schindler's. The movie thus becomes a mythic representation not only of its title hero, but of its director, as this maker reworks the materials of the historical Schindler and the Schindler of Thomas Keneally's 1982 novel.

The next three articles focus on their biopics through the lenses of scientific, cultural, and political paradigms. T. Hugh Crawford's "Glowing Dishes: Radium, Marie Curie, and Hollywood" deftly discusses the intersection of two apparatuses of observation, penetration, and objectification

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

—the scientific and the filmic—as they bear on the twin subjects of the 1943 biopic *Madame Curie:* radium and the woman scientist. Crawford concludes that both the scientific and filmic apparatuses are sexist in practice, for they work to objectify nature, identified as feminine, and women. Even as the filmic apparatus positions Greer Garson's Marie Curie as agent, it subverts that agency through masculine tropes and points of view that parallel the scientific method's positioning and fixing of its subject/object. At the beginning of "Oscar Wilde at the Movies: British Sexual Politics and *The Green Carnation* (1960)," Margaret D. Stetz describes the cultural and political agendas of various Oscar Wilde projects in the last two decades of the millennium, before turning to the two 1960 British biopics *Oscar Wilde* and *The Green Carnation* to analyze their function in the cultural and political debates of their time—and in particular those sparked by the Wolfenden Report (1957), which recommended that homosexual behavior no longer be a criminal offense in Great Britain. Stetz argues that while *The Green Carnation* effectively participated in this debate, it was at the expense of distorting Wilde's true subversiveness as part of a strategy of presenting him as acceptable to the public. And James Burns' "Biopics and Politics: The Making and Unmaking of the Rhodes Movies" draws on archival material to unearth the historical and political factors that contributed to the production—and non-production—of movies based on the life of the South African imperialist Cecil Rhodes. Burns identifies a total of nine Rhodes projects proposed since 1916. Seven failed to make the movie screens for political reasons. The two that were made—the 1936 British Gaumont production of *Rhodes of Africa,* and the 1997 BBC production of *Rhodes*—made it to the screen only because of the support of the South African government. Burns also explores the very different historical circumstances—the colonial and the postcolonial, respectively—surrounding the making and reception of both biopics.

George F. Custen's "The Mechanical Life in the Age of Human Reproduction: American Biopics, 1961–1980" links the changes in the biopic after 1960 to transformations in the cultural and industrial landscape of America, and of Hollywood in particular. Custen shows how the age of television, global technologies, and the conglomerate structure of post-studio Hollywood influence the kinds of films and biopics made in the 60s and 70s. His title refers to Hollywood's increasing dependence after 1970 on new technologies to forge a cinema of spectacle and attraction, rather than human performances. His acute observations on postmodern culture and industry, and especially their impact on media production and reception of the Hollywood biopic, make this an important source for any future study

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


of the post-studio era. Custen's essay also continues his groundbreaking work on the Hollywood biopic from 1927–1960 found in *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* The table on "Biopic Professions" for 1961–1980 accompanying this article complements those covering 1927–1960 found in *Bio/Pics.*

Custen argues that television's emphasis on the ordinary, flawed human subject, which reflects tabloid journalism's appeal to a widespread popular audience, is characteristic of the cynical, disillusioned, Watergate decade of the 1970s. In "'Everybody Loves Somebody': The A&E "Rat Pack" Biographies," Mikita Brottman argues that the A&E Biography© series began reversing this trend in 1984 by developing formulaic narratives that venerate their subjects, and in the process create "a mass fantasy of the happiness of mythical pasts." She demonstrates her thesis by showing how the "Rat Pack" biographies, aired in January 1999, whitewash their subjects by reducing them to stereotypes in melodramatic narratives of good and evil. The series thus remakes the past "in the light of our more conservative, present cultural climate, which seems to have a need for unsullied heroes, possibly even saints."

Audrey Levasseur's "Film and Video Self-Biographies" defines a relatively new subgenre of the biopic, one that combines biography and autobiography in film and video biographies usually commissioned, produced, or even made by the biographical subject him/herself—hence the term "self-biographies." To explore the problem inherent in any self-biography —that if the subject controls the production, the result tends to be celebratory and univocal—Levasseur contrasts three examples of the univocal —celebrity self-biographies of Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Ginsberg—with two that are multivocal—a celebrity self-biography of Marlene Dietrich, and a non-celebrity self-biography of director Alan Berliner's father Oscar. The latter two differ primarily because of the control exercised by the films' directors, whose motivations and treatment clash with those of their subjects' intentions—Maximilian Schell's with Dietrich's, and Berliner's with his father Oscar's.

And finally, Lucy Fischer's "*Marlene:* Modernity, Mortality, and the Biopic" displays a startling array of discourses that intersect brilliantly in her meditation on the Schell documentary biopic *Marlene* (1983). Through her exemplary practice, Fischer's essay eloquently sums up how an eclectic contextualized approach can reveal the biopic as a multivalenced text. Levasseur argues that the clash between the director and his star subject results in a multivocal text. Fischer increases the stakes through a feminist take on the conflict between director and subject which explores this

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

relationship in terms of gender roles and power, thus opening the text up to its deeper structures. But Fischer goes even further. She also draws out of this biopic several tropes associated with cine-modernism—among them, self-reflexivity, the film apparatus as a gendering instrument, performance and the body, and the problematic of representation as both a preservation from death and an embalmment signifying death. In this way, Fischer reminds us that as the life quickens on the screen and enters the mythic consciousness of the community, the biopic also memorializes moments that are fleeting.

## WORKS CITED

Anderson, Carolyn. "Biographical Film." *A Handbook of American Film Genres.* Ed. Wes D. Gehring. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988: 331–51.

Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.

Penn, Arthur. "*Bonnie and Clyde:* Private Integrity and Public Violence." *Bonnie and Clyde.* Ed. Sandra Wake and Nicola Hayden. New York: Frederick Ungar,1983. 7–11.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# NOT THE FULL STORY: REPRESENTING RUTH ELLIS

SUE TWEG

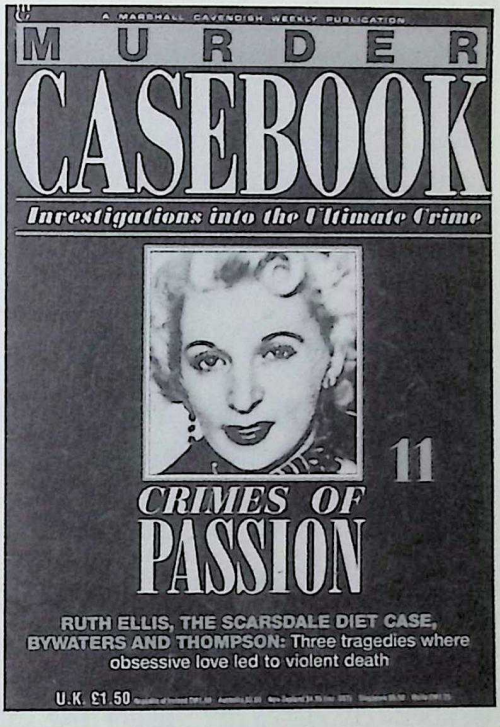
*I must close now but remember I am quite happy with the verdict, but not the way the story was told, there is so much that people don't know about.*

Ruth Ellis, on the eve of her execution (Hancock 2)

## THE SUBJECT IN QUESTION

Although she was briefly an international celebrity, Ruth Ellis is not immediately memorable to people nowadays. She is best recognized by readers of "true crime" magazines, where she often features as the enduring pulp-fiction stereotype of tough blonde floozy—just the kind who would kill a playboy lover in a fit of jealous rage.

The real twenty-eight year old murderess named Ruth Ellis, who was hanged in Holloway Prison, London, on July 13, 1955, remains historically significant because the circumstances of her case contributed the last telling example to a gathering nationwide concern about the justice of capital punishment. Lingering questions about her crim-




A Marshall Cavendish Publication, Murder Casebook Vol. 1, Part 11 © 1990 Marshall Cavendish Partworks. Cover photo of Ruth Ellis © Popperfoto.


In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

inal actions, the handling of her trial, and her execution helped to bring about the greatest change in criminal law the British judicial system had hitherto countenanced—the abolition of the mandatory death penalty for murder.

The woman in question died in 1955. Capital punishment for most crimes of murder was abolished a decade later. Mike Newell's biopic of Ruth Ellis, *Dance with a Stranger,* titled after one of her favorite Peggy Lee songs, screened on both sides of the Atlantic in 1985[1]—again a critical time for the abolitionist cause in Britain, with arguments for the death penalty once more a hot political issue. The film's creators drew on interviews, Old Bailey trial transcripts, and other details which Ellis's original biographer, Robert Hancock, had first presented at length in 1963. Documentation of the film project's evolution suggests that Newell and his team understood their work's potential for carrying a powerful social message, even without placing overt emphasis on Ruth Ellis's trial and execution. *Dance with a Stranger,* therefore, concentrated on the last two years of her life, underpinning a lingering popular image of Ellis as a "good-time girl," but with a story closer to the sad truth of the matter—that she never *had* a good time.

This article discusses how Ellis's biography continued to be constructed socially over the three decades after her death, and thus engages with a fundamental issue of biopic making—how to tell a story. In the case of Ruth Ellis, there are two films to consider: *Dance with a Stranger,* and the less well-known 1956 "quasi-biopic" *Yield to the Night,* directed by J. Lee Thompson. Both have contributed to an ongoing social representation of the subject "Ruth Ellis" in public memory.

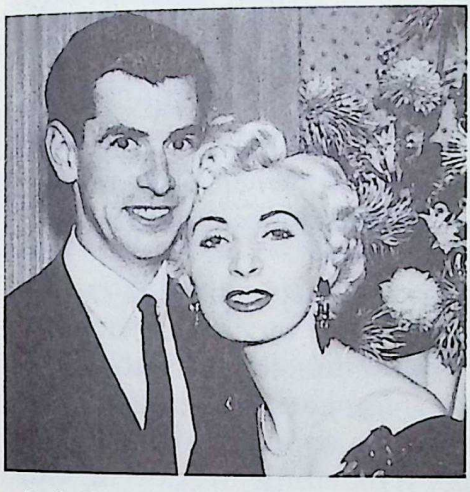
These films may be thought of as intertexts in that they both tell significant parts of what is generally (if erroneously) recognized as the Ellis "story." Both are tightly focused narratives, reducing the potential life span of a full biographical study to the last significant part of their subjects' lives—just over a year in one case, and under three weeks in the other. Through their chosen narrative, stylistic, and casting strategies, the films give a singular generic shape to their main characters—two socially deviant women in the same specific historical and social environment—while developing a discourse to critique simplistic moral readings of the transgressors who are their main subjects. In this way, as I shall argue, both films deliberately deny the viewer the easy closure that would comfortably fix Ruth Ellis's "story." Ultimately, despite each film's attempt to be truthful in its own way, neither the fictionalized reworking of the punishment nor the fictionalized biopic tells a "full" story of Ruth Ellis.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

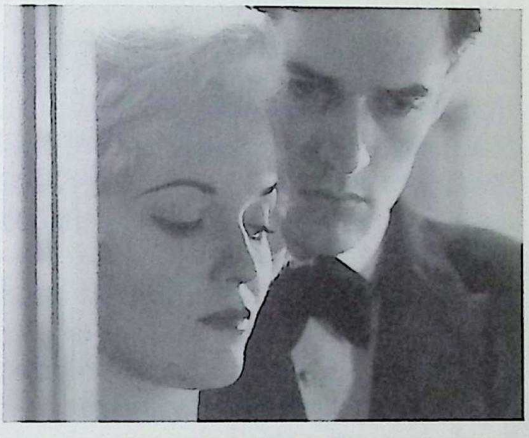
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Diana Dors in *Yield to the Night*, (© 1956 Associated British Pictures.) © Mirror Syndication International.

Finally, we should also note that the actresses chosen to represent the main character in each film immediately took on an intertextual significance of another kind in relation to Ruth Ellis. At least in one instance, Ellis's life pattern was closely mirrored by Diana Dors, her contemporary, while the strong visual resemblance and perceived echoes of character between actress Miranda Richardson and Ellis brought the once-living woman back with a haunting immediacy in Newell's film. Onscreen, then, Ruth Ellis is situated within a complex, constructed biographical field of circumstances.



Ruth Ellis and David Blakeley. © Mirror Syndication International.



Miranda Richardson and Rupert Everett as Ellis and Blakeley in *Dance With a Stranger* © 1985 Goldcrest/First Pictures. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive.

## RUTH ELLIS IN LIFE

Ruth Neilson's life looked set to be tough but unremarkable. Born in 1926 and brought up between the world wars in a respectable working class family, she left school in her teens, worked briefly in a factory, and then found photographic work that took her to London and introduced her to the city's nightlife. According to family accounts, she was ambitious to better

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

herself, but soon fell into the same trap as many other young women at that time. After a brief affair in 1944 with a married French-Canadian soldier, she gave birth to a son, who was cared for by her family while Ruth found work to support them.

Soon spotted by a West End club owner, she was set up as a "hostess," and became a popular attraction at the bar. Since the club was a discreet cover for prostitution, a hostess could earn extra money by obliging the customers upstairs after first encouraging them to buy champagne and spirits downstairs at exorbitant black-market prices. In this environment she met her future husband, George Ellis. Given the opportunity to make a secure life for her son, Ruth then left the Club to become (she hoped) a respectable wife and mother.

Undermined by alcohol and violence on both sides, the marriage broke down almost immediately. Ruth moved back to London with two small children, and was offered another nightclub job by her former employer. Here she met Desmond Cussen, who became her friend and protector; soon afterwards, she got to know a young racing driver named David Blakely. In 1953, the owner gave Ruth a promotion to manager of his Little Club in Knightsbridge. She also had a flat, where Blakely, now her lover, could spend the night. The same old combination of alcohol and jealous mayhem set in, causing tensions in the relationship. According to evidence from witnesses and Ruth's own testimony, both she and David drank too much, and were violently jealous, obsessional, and abusive. They would break up and make up frequently, until Easter 1955 when, after a miscarriage and a last betrayal, Ruth pursued David and shot him dead outside a London pub.

Photographs of Ruth Ellis in her mid-twenties depict her as a carefully made-up bottle blonde in low-cut evening gowns or very short shorts. The kind of glamor she favored is still instantly recognizable and fatally easy to stereotype as "cheap." She might have remained just another anonymous good-time girl—until she committed murder. In an internationally publicized trial at London's Old Bailey, the jury took a little over twenty minutes to deliberate before agreeing on a guilty verdict, and given the way the evidence had been presented, her last minute appeal for clemency was doomed to fail.

## RUTH ELLIS BECOMES A STORY

Ellis's biography fit effortlessly into the mold of pulp fiction. Tales of heavy drinking, wasted money, brawls, sexual orgies, abortions, presents from rich admirers, and the glamor of the Brand's Hatch racing-car crowd enhanced dry descriptions of legal procedure. The press provided sensationalized

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


accounts of what night-club life was like, for the benefit of the vast majority of Britons in an exhausted, impoverished, and repressed postwar society who hadn't much idea about night-clubs anyway. A male friend, who lived and worked in London during the Fifties, suggested (in a recent private conversation) that the West End drinking clubs he knew were pretty tame affairs—"about the only place after the war where you could go in London to get an alcoholic drink in the evening, take somebody there, listen to some music—it wasn't very exciting, really."

Undeterred by facts, and anticipating plenty of copy from the lengthy trial which failed to materialize, journalists established and spiced up the morality play angle of Ellis's story. Robert Hancock was first commissioned to write her life for the *Woman's Sunday Mirror* in 1955 by the tabloid editor Jim Eilbeck, who clearly anticipated a racy tale of "champagne, high life and excitement" to titillate his readers' romantic fantasies (1). But when Hancock interviewed Ellis in prison, she told him that she didn't want details of her past life exposed, refusing to allow him to write, as he described it, "a story that revealed the sad, mad nature of her character or, for example, that for years she had made her money from prostitution and posing for pornographic pictures" (2).

Even if her morals invited censure, Ruth Ellis still attracted a degree of popular sympathy. She was a single mother with young children, and the victim of physical abuse. She allowed herself to be arrested without resistance, confessed at once, and appeared hardly aware of what was happening. She tried to keep up appearances at her trial, but fatally misjudged how her freshly peroxided hair and painted nails would be interpreted by a conservative middle-class jury at the Old Bailey, clearly alienated by such a show of vulgarity.

Having exploited the sordid side of Ruth Ellis's image during her trial, some newspapers played up her end as romantic melodrama, constructing her death as "death wish." Such a reading was supported by the "chin-up" heroic tone of Ellis's last letters to friends from prison, in which she claimed she was satisfied to be dying for her lover. Stories circulated about how a railway signalman near Holloway noticed that birds stopped singing as she died, how someone played a hymn on a violin outside the prison walls, and how cruel schoolboys checked their wristwatches in the countdown to 9 a.m. on July 13th (Hancock 186–88, Park 175).

Public protests continued up to the day of the execution, as did the stream of anti-hanging letters to newspapers, including several from the popular crime writer Raymond Chandler to the London *Evening Standard*. Local and foreign press reports picked up the theme of English hypocrisy,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

suggesting that Ruth Ellis was really being punished for immorality rather than murder. Protesters outside Holloway Prison prayed, sang, and held up banners reading "Evans, Bentley, Ellis,"[2] while Albert Pierrepoint, her hangman, later recalled "the outcry against" his hanging Ruth Ellis "as the last great sentimental protest against capital punishment in Great Britain" (204).

When Hancock expanded his account of Ellis's life and trial in 1963, he put it forward as the full story, claiming "it is as much of the truth as I can discover" (2). While purporting to give a non-exploitative account of her irregular lifestyle, Hancock discreetly inflected his style to imitate pulp-fiction copy. His descriptions tagged Ellis's social class by alluding frequently to her preferred dress style and appearance (common), her occupation (not respectable), and her performance as a mother (self-centered and neglectful). He also noted reported personality defects. She was jealous, obsessional, sexually voracious, ambitious, defensively proud, and subject to aggressively violent outbursts. And what her own terse, matter-of-fact confession to the police on the night of her arrest had failed to include, Hancock was ready to supply, pointing out that Ellis had made no mention of "the fights, jealousies, reconciliations and midnight car chases that gave film-like quality to their relationship" (14).

Mike Newell's Ruth Ellis emerged from Hancock's biographical material, which itself had already gone some way to dramatize her as a film subject. Here, for example, is Hancock's imaginatively amplified account of her response to hearing the death sentence at the Old Bailey:

> she turned about, and with a smile for her parents and friends at the back of the court, clicked briskly down the stairs to the cells. Nobody could say that Ruth Ellis had not played her part as well as any Hollywood gangster's moll sent to fry by the District Attorney. (169)

Somewhat speciously, Hancock also disclaimed journalistic fictionalizing even as he sought to give the Ellis story universal appeal by stressing the similarity between the doomed couple and the media-shaped fantasies of ordinary folk: "The everyday world of men and women is not the deodorized glossy lies of the TV commercial and the woman's magazine. There is a David Blakely in every man, and a Ruth Ellis in every woman" (3).

Following a similar fictionalizing impulse, in 1985 script writer Shelagh Delaney also obviously wanted to present something more than the basic facts of Ellis's life. In an *Observer Magazine* interview, she identified Ruth's and David's suffering as greater than average in order to naturalize it as the basis for a grander than average love affair. "[H]ow many of us ever get the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


chance to experience a relationship as intense and powerful as theirs?" she asked readers (French). Like Hancock, Delaney was prepared to add seasoning to everyday facts, to persuade ordinary people to consume the cautionary narrative with just a touch of envious longing.

## MELODRAMA AND THE BIOPIC

As we know from countless examples over the last half century of popular cinema, transgressive female characters are habitually constructed to be read generically. In the case of the films associated with Ruth Ellis, the coded structures and visual stylistics of two widely recognized genres that were popular in her own lifetime, the melodrama and film noir, define the hybrid "noir-melodrama," a term that I will use to characterize the production values of both *Dance with a Stranger* and *Yield to the Night*.[3] The visual discourse is noir-melodrama because both films deal with the subject of a woman trapped by historical circumstances, gender, economic position, social class, and psychological disturbance, for whom there can be no adequate social reintegration other than by a "justifiable" death. These films neither valorize nor sentimentalize their central characters in a reductive way, although the makers' bias inevitably shapes the discourse about obsession, murder, and punishment. Finally, both in form and content, these films can be read as critiques of the very closure that the given narratives make inevitable.

Applied to film, the term "melodrama" signals that the viewer may anticipate dramatic content grounded in recognizable social material about people in everyday reality who experience heightened emotions when they encounter unusual and challenging circumstances. Disruptive feelings are released onscreen, leading to individual crises and a series of threats to personal, domestic, and (therefore) community stability. Melodrama strives to resolve all this disruption satisfactorily by manipulating narrative closure, after a cathartic moment of action that restores personal, domestic, and social harmony. While closure of this kind may offer comfort to the viewing audience, it poses problems for filmmakers who consider that not all narratives about life can be tidied up to present uplifting moral fables—nor indeed should be.

Classic Hollywood melodrama has been extensively theorized, especially in terms of its perceived inner tensions and ideological shortcomings. "The world is closed and the characters acted upon," says Thomas Elsaesser of the social and domestic frame in which melodramatic characters must exist, arguing that "they emerge as lesser human beings for having become wise and acquiescent to the ways of the world" (Gledhill 62). Characters

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

who do not find their way to happy conformity tend to resort to inner violence, Elsaesser argues, turning against themselves rather than directing their frustrations outward.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith pinpoints a more fundamental issue, arguing that the melodramatic form cannot accommodate any of the problems its narrative inevitably exposes. In the end, melodrama "lays them open in their shameless contradictoriness, opening a space which most Hollywood film forms have studiously closed off" (Gledhill 74). Popular films of the 1950s, Ellis's fateful decade, tended to characterize women's psychological, emotional, and physical problems as directly or indirectly related to men in their lives. The films clearly worked to reinforce ideological norms of the period, illustrating how women who strayed from social respectability by going out dancing, getting pregnant, committing adultery or theft, or drinking and gambling, were likely to come to a shameful end. Marcia Landy identifies a crucial link between melodrama and women as social subjects: "In the context of the social problem film and its preoccupation with social adjustment, the melodrama offers itself as the only language available to address the unnamed conflicts confronted by women's desire" (455).

Landy's work examines postwar British directors, including J. Lee Thompson, who focused on deviant women and youth, two groups that forces of social control—primarily depicted as senior males, or senior professional women as agents of patriarchal authority—sought to curb and bring back into conformity. Or as Thompson, the director of *Yield to the Night,* puts it:

> In every film I do I hold on to something, some social problem. Now, if you say "should the audience always see social problems?", no, not in a million years. The cinema is a mass medium for world audiences—there's nothing wrong with a Bob Hope/Bing Crosby picture. They're not trying to show any big social problems, but I personally *must.* (*Films and Filming* 6)

The biopic maker who chooses melodrama as the vehicle to depict a subject is confronted by several dilemmas when that subject has ended as badly as Ruth Ellis. The first task is to negotiate ways in which known facts can be shaped and inflected to relate effectively to the main project—creating a good story. At the same time, though, like its siblings the docudrama and the tv news "reenactment," the biopic inevitably strays into an ethical no-man's land, caught between sticking to a content of known facts, however unpalatable, and fabricating an absorbing fictional structure. Ruth Ellis was executed by law. Her biography cannot be separated from the much larger

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

issue of capital punishment that inevitably accompanies her, since it defined her end and must feature somehow in any telling of her story. The temptation might be to manipulate such a subject to take second place in her own biopic, effectively turning her into a stalking horse for the filmmakers' concern with a strong social issue. This is Lee Thompson's strategy in *Yield to the Night*. A fictional essay made near the time of Ellis's death, the film is obsessively focused on imprisonment and the waiting noose, and conveys an unmistakable urgency as a more generalized social message. Newell, on the other hand, resists the temptation to foreground the issue of capital punishment in relation to the specific character by omitting any visual reference to Ellis's trial, locating her in prison only for the last few frames of the film. And yet, mise-en-scène after the first crisis in the narrative is nonetheless carefully structured to hint at the kind of punishment waiting for her, as the discussion below will indicate.

When closure cannot be contrived to end happily, or at least satisfactorily, film melodrama may adopt other narrative strategies to justify a potentially unsatisfying ending. It may, for instance, become necessary to recode the moral nature of the central character who loses out, by inferring or demonstrating that the end is in some way deserved. This is certainly how a narrative of the transgressive woman could be, and has been, manipulated. But melodramatic structure is strained to the utmost in both *Yield to the Night* and *Dance with a Stranger*. Since neither film aims to keep its troubling narrative open, each plays with the "just deserts" model in order to critique the very idea of the closure it nonetheless proposes.

*Yield to the Night* demonstrates that, for most of the characters in positions of authority charged with punishing Mary Hilton, the argument of "just deserts" is the unquestioned norm. By contrast, the viewer is led by narrative details and mise-en-scène to read against the grain, and so experience doubt rather than the same normative acceptance. Newell's initial technique, in the case of his real-life subject, is to follow film melodrama's alternative strategy for allaying viewer discomfort about "just deserts" through sympathetic understanding—Yes, this person must certainly pay the price but now we understand how it could all have happened. Ellis, the transgressor, is shown to have lived a difficult life, thereby attracting just enough viewer sympathy to make her act understandable while still making her behavior reprehensible.

Newell's film thus deploys noir scenic effects and surreal compositions to make such a fuzzy reconciliation of subject to ending impossible. Because Ellis is finally depicted as a deranged victim of circumstance, the viewer's sense of her guilt, while not being completely erased, is severely

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

complicated by doubts. Closing the film on her letter to David's mother, which incidentally alludes to her imminent death, only heightens the problems of justice in this case. In melodrama, the viewer understands that the death of a character may be recoded as nobility in giving up life for a greater cause, or to be reunited with a dead love, or as showing fortitude and forgiveness for the injustice done. Some of Ruth Ellis's actual letters from prison, one of which Newell uses, display this lofty tone, but for the most part her letters tend to illustrate the severity of her delusion rather than strength of character—and this is how Newell chooses to depict her at the end of his story.[4]

## RUTH ELLIS FILM STYLE: NOIR-MELODRAMA

Neither *Yield to the Night* nor *Dance with a Stranger,* then, are constructed to offer the option of satisfactory closure on Ruth Ellis. Instead, they demand active engagement from the viewer to dwell at length on the protagonist's fraught circumstances. This is where melodramatic structure must connect with film noir stylistics to enable an ending of sorts to occur.[5] Generically recognizable from the black and white visual images of life on Raymond Chandler's "mean streets" of urban 1940s and 1950s America and Europe, film noir has immediate resonances with the historical milieu of Ruth Ellis. Noir visuals are designed to unsettle the viewer, to disorientate perceptions or distort the mise-en-scène, and so underline the confusion that is the emotional state of the characters depicted. While the mise-en-scène may bear a resemblance to reality, with a documentary look in location shots, there is an unnerving dislocation too, a sense of being in a nightmare world of uncertainty and lurking danger. As the establishing shots in *Yield to the Night,* for example, take the viewer across London with Mary Hilton on her vengeful errand, the scene is bright but fragmented and expressionistically framed. In *Dance with a Stranger,* Ruth Ellis has her final meetings with David first in a dense London fog, and then at night. Both scenes are full of hazy chiaroscuro, making the viewer work hard to decode imagery and meaning.

This is characteristic of the film noir environment, which is defined by sharp angles and deep shadows, with disturbingly oblique framing of the subjects, caught in canted or raked shots. Such a disorientated night world is an apt setting for doomed one-sided affairs and casual sex. While the voice-over commentary by the criminal-victims—Mary Hilton in *Yield to the Night,* and Ruth Ellis reading her letter—emphasizes their hopelessly obsessional entrapment in memories and feelings, the person's physical body is seen to be equally restrained and oppressed onscreen in a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

claustrophobic prison cell, night club, or alley. Recurrent imagery of bars, locks, and chains frequently reminds viewers of how and where the narrative will all end. The publicity still of Diana Dors as Mary Hilton, for example, situates her looking glamorously doleful —behind bars— while Newell constructs a classic noir mise-en-scène of entrapment behind railings for Ruth just before she steps out to shoot David.

Diana Dors as Mary Hilton, behind bars (publicity still for *Yield to the Night*, © 1956 Associated British Pictures). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives).

Noir holds a critical mirror up to melodrama to reflect *in reverse* what melodrama asserts as socially desirable norms and goals. Melodrama seeks to show individuals finding ways to be content with domestic safety and life within the law; film noir notices only barriers and intolerable restrictions. In noir, individuals remain discontented and unsatisfied. They break out and refuse to conform, or they can't break in, excluded from respectable society by their economic and social circumstances. Hence, in the usual way of homiletic drama, their relationships inevitably go sour. They are likely to kill or be killed, go mad, or be punished in other ways—rehabilitation is not an option.

Above all, lovers in film noir cannot experience without pain or loss the grand passion which is a staple of melodrama. Janey Place describes the world and psyche of film-noir women as "paranoid, claustrophobic, hopeless, doomed, predetermined by the past, without clear moral or personal identity" (46). Though "independence is her goal," the noir female's "nature is fundamentally and irredeemably sexual," confirming Hancock's noir-inflected characterization of Ellis as a woman driven by conflicting impulses to live independently while needing to be involved with a male protector.

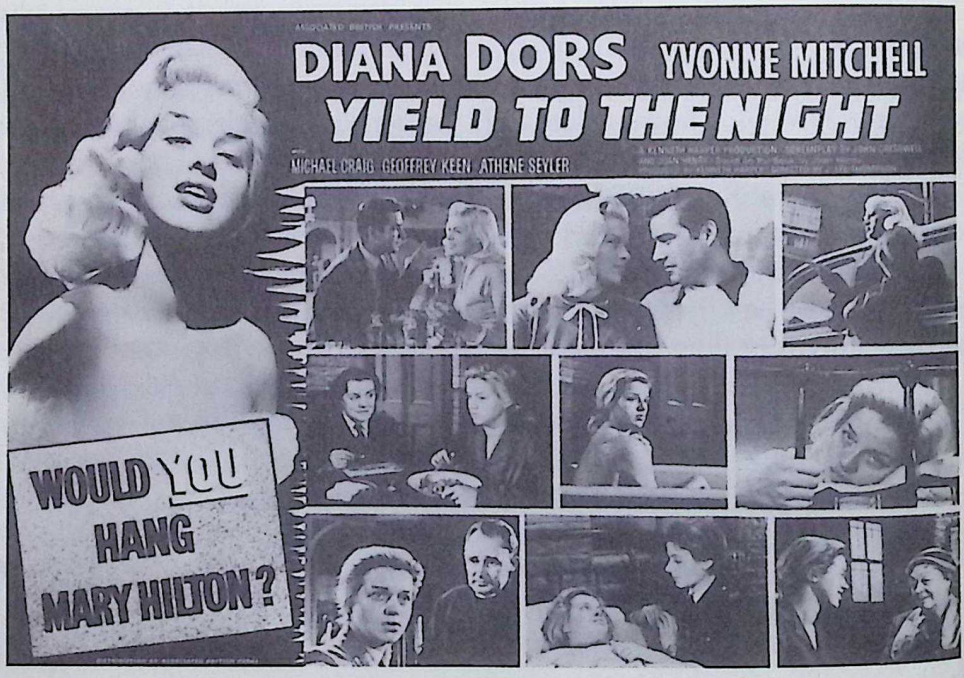
CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## YIELD TO THE NIGHT (1956)

I consider *Yield to the Night* to be a "quasi-biopic" because that is how it was read by contemporary viewers. This fiction film designed for international distribution was finishing production even as the Ellis case was passing through the courts. Historical circumstance, and the popular glamorous notoriety of its leading performer, Diana Dors, virtually guaranteed that fact would become enmeshed in fiction to the point where, despite differences, they were being read as identical—and especially in suggesting a fictional alter ego for Ellis in the film's protagonist Mary Hilton. The film succeeded. Not only did *Yield to the Night* effect how Ruth Ellis would be remembered in the mid-fifties, but it lingered culturally and stylistically long enough to invite comparison with Newell's 1985 biopic.

Fact and fiction collided head on for the production team in *Yield to the Night.* According to actor Michael Craig, everyone in the film's cast had problems with the disturbing conjunction between making a fiction about a crime of passion leading to a woman's execution and what they knew was occurring outside the studio.[6] Thus, although the link between *Yield to the Night* and the circumstances of Ellis's crime and punishment was never explicitly advertised, it was implicitly understood. Although "the fact that the victim is a woman is a twist away from the real life murder the film in




Advertising Poster for *Yield to the Night* (© 1956 Associated British Pictures). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

other ways suggests," the London *Times* critic, in a June 18, 1956 review, called the film "a camera in the condemned cell," pointing out how the director had mingled "a conscientious realism with an attempt at something more imaginative," in treating a subject "which would seem to base itself on a recent murder case." Advertising posters blatantly sold the film by asking the public "Would you hang Mary Hilton?"—the very question that same public was asking about Ruth Ellis. Parliamentarians were also encouraged to engage with the bigger issue through a private screening of the quasi-biopic. Organized by anti-hanging campaigners at the National Film Theatre on the very day the Abolition Bill was being debated in the House of Lords, according to a *News Chronicle* report, only six "honourable members" turned up to confront the emotional force of *Yield to the Night* ("Six Peers").

Daily Mirror
FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE
Millions of people are worried about the fate of RUTH ELLIS. Today we ask our readers—
SHOULD HANGING BE STOPPED?
RUTH ELLIS . . . HER EXECUTION HAS SET THE WHOLE WORLD TALKING.
Please express your opinion on the voting form in the Back Page
One man had to decide her fate
Time for a change in the Law?
M.P.s would not go past the prison
THIS is the Gin...
Gordon's

*Daily Mirror* front page for July 14, 1955.
© Mirror Syndication International.

## MARY HILTON AS RUTH ELLIS'S FICTIONAL ALTER EGO

In conventional melodrama, film closure comes with the resolution to a problem, and that comes when the erstwhile rebel learns to fit in and become acceptable to the community. Although Hilton in *Yield to the Night* cannot do this actually (since she will not be released), she can prove she's agreed to conform symbolically by acquiescing to her own killing. Accepting punishment for her crime is suggested to her as the "right" thing to do, because as a wardress says, "it makes it easier to bear." But the viewer is encouraged to respond with an obvious question—easier for whom? As a result, what happens at the end of *Yield to the Night* is uncomfortably like the closure of a "snuff" movie.

Joan Henry's novel on which the film was based was a grimly apt text for the times well before the Ellis case. Stirring public memories of the recent Evans and Bentley executions, it was also topical because it focused

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

on a woman prisoner, a subject fresh in the public mind from the execution of Mrs. Louisa Merrifield, hanged in 1953.

Shot in black and white, and narrated in the first-person voice-over of Mary Hilton, *Yield to the Night* is the story of an obsessive emotional relationship. The dramatic locus is the condemned cell in Holloway Prison, where Hilton waits out her last three weeks of life. Events that led up to this situation are presented to the viewer through a series of extensive flashbacks that haunt Hilton's daytime reveries and dreams as she endures life in maddeningly claustrophobic conditions, constantly watched by two wardresses.

Details of Hilton's life emerge. The dull, unromantic, workingman husband. A chance meeting with the good-looking piano player and gambler called Jim, who flirts but doesn't want her—he even tells her it's her duty to stay with her husband, when she has abandoned her respectable marriage. Her overwhelming delusions of relationship as she dances with him, and his obsession with a wealthy socialite called Lucy, who wears "Christmas Rose"—the same expensive perfume as Mary. Hilton identifies with her rival and envies her, while obsessively mothering the reluctant Jim. When he turns up drunk on her doorstep in the middle of the night to be looked after, his return sustains her fantasy that deep down he loves her and will finally choose her over her rival. The emotional crisis for Mary comes after Jim commits suicide, leaving his last loving note to the other woman. After reading in a newspaper that the inquest has exonerated Lucy from any responsibility for Jim's death, Mary uses his gun to act out what she imagines Jim really wanted to do when he killed himself. In voice-over narration, she describes how she felt her hatred for Lucy "welling up."

The mise-en-scène moves through characteristically noir locations: a drinking club, bedrooms, chaotic London streets, the constricting shadowy death cell and walled exercise yard. The viewer is voyeur from the film's opening shot. We peep at Mary's ankles and fetishistic high heels from under the park bench she leaves, on her mission to kill Lucy. Keeping its distance, in hiding, sneaking shots from behind fountains, trees, walls, cars, and railings, the camera tracks Mary's journey across London. The whole woman is rarely glimpsed. We see just legs, feet, her back, her hand fitting Lucy's key into the lock, then firing the gun. Like her own emotions, she is already in fragments. And when she points her gun directly at the camera, the startled voyeur momentarily becomes the victim of the femme fatale's grim purpose.

From this point of opening, the mise-en-scène works to expose the crippling structure of Mary's new surroundings in prison, her last experiences of socializing. Melodramatic conventions are invoked and critiqued

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


in several fundamental ways. Most significantly, prison is presented as a grotesque parody of domestic life. Mary, who deliberately forfeited her adult domestic status as Fred's wife, has been redefined as disobedient child, and further depersonalized and unsexed by being addressed by surname only, reminiscent of the strict world of school. Sleeping pills and the utter boredom of routine maintain her quiescence. Under adult supervision of several uniformed "mothers"—tougher forms of her ineffectual real mother, who must remain outside these walls—Mary is constantly monitored during exercise, playing table games, at bathtime, and when she goes to bed. Her nails are cut, and her food (mushy eggs and porridge) is designed for spoons, since she cannot be trusted with adult implements like scissors or knives and forks. Though pampered in some respects by having all adult domestic responsibility taken from her, the controlling surveillance denies her any privacy. Hilton soon learns to play the role of "wise child." She knows what's beyond the door with no handles in her death cell, and so is permitted occasional naughty tantrums because the final punishment that's coming to her will be far worse—and not something the overtly compliant women warders care to think about. In this domestic melodrama, father figures (prison doctor, priest, and lawyer) are held in contempt by Mary and the wardresses alike. Hilton also remains cynically unconvinced by her husband's professed concern. She suggests he'll make money out of her when he sells the story to the papers. Holloway Prison is thus seen to be a woman's world, where the upper-class professional woman Governor, her warders, the nurse, and the Quaker prison visitor, all minister to their special prisoner-daughter, trying to reclaim her conscience.[7]

Lee Thompson's film exposes how small the distance actually is between Mary and her guards. Warders frequently gossip intimately in front of Mary, whose presence, like that of a child, causes them no embarrassment. They hint at the less than happy circumstances of their own domestic lives—of dull marriages, personal loneliness, difficult parents, their own aging and menopause, and in one case, the show of being butch disciplinarian to cover anxiety about colleagues' dislike. When they lecture Mary Hilton about dutifully accepting her lot or showing politeness to the mother and husband she would rather not meet, the women who guard her reveal stresses which they themselves accommodate as part of conventional living. They try to encourage Mary in extremis to be unselfish and think about the people who will have to live with "this" for the rest of their lives, while keeping her in an environment that can only lead to utter self-absorption.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

During those periods of retreat into memory, Mary Hilton presents the viewer with conflicting visual messages about the kind of woman she really is, being neither wife, daughter, nor girlfriend. While her body language appears to be frankly inviting with Jim as she lies on his bed to chat, or takes off her clothes for a bath at his apartment, her character retains a level of sexual naiveté because she is understood to be in the grip of a powerful romantic, not just sexual, fantasy. Nonetheless, as a married woman her expressed views on free behavior mark her as being at the outer limit of Fifties' respectability. Hilton is thus ambiguously coded. She challenges conventional readings either as melodramatic loser (to be pitied) or noir temptress (to be shunned). She is first seen as a glamorous young woman behind a beauty counter. She looks stylish but immodest, a sleek peroxide blonde in clothes that emphasize her curvaceous figure. Later, in a noir-styled mise-en-scène, she waits at home by the phone on New Year's Eve, wearing a stunning outfit that is clearly "overdone" for a woman in her social condition. There is far too much cleavage showing to be respectable—unless the woman is read as the starlet performer, Diana Dors, whose superior glamor frequently eclipses the character she is playing while, at the same time, imbuing "Mary Hilton" with external signs of a fulfilled ambition to pass as rich and glamorous enough to cancel out disadvantageous class origins.

## DIANA DORS AS LIVING ALTER EGO

In the year of Ellis's death, the young film star Diana Dors was at the Venice Film Festival, attracting publicity for *Yield to the Night* by doing outrageous things on the Grand Canal in her mink and diamond bikini. The part of Mary Hilton was hailed as a triumph for Dors because it proved she could sustain a major role and transform herself physically into her antithesis, a drab woman. As a teenager, Dors had featured in postwar social problem films, usually as a neighborhood sexual delinquent, but *Yield to the Night* was her ticket to international fame and Hollywood. With her tight clothes, huge breasts, and brilliant peroxided hair, this popular British sex symbol of the Fifties was likened to Bardot and Monroe. Diana Dors enjoyed the fast life, collecting money, husbands and children, jewels, minks, and cadillacs on the way up.[8]

Comparisons between Dors and Ellis are inevitably sad. Dors came from a poor family, was fiercely ambitious at an early age (and sexually precocious), attracted men, and took up modeling. Her looks were better and her grooming smoother than Ellis's. Psychologically she was more stable and she had more humor and talent, which was fostered. But she also had luck. Diana Dors—original name Fluck—was the true alter ego of Ruth

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Ellis's postwar dreams. Especially when they were shooting the traumatizing last scene, Dors was strongly affected by what happened to Ellis. Commenting on the film's success at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, Dors underlined the importance of the role for her as a confirmation of her acting ability. "Whatever happens to me for the rest of my career," she remarked, "at least I can always point with pride at *Yield to the Night* and say 'I did *that*" (253). The publicity still of Diana Dors as Mary Hilton recalls how a visitor described meeting the real-life prisoner in her cell after she had been condemned to death: "She was a poor little pale thing in a grey dress. She wore no make-up and her hair was done in a pony tail style" (Hancock 173). There is thus a certain convoluted irony in the fact that Dors played a romantic loser in the fictional *Yield to the Night,* and reaped enormous public rewards for her performance, after Ruth Ellis had so recently been punished for representing her real-life affair and last weeks of notoriety as a convincing "glamorous tough girl" performance along the lines of Dors' publicity-filled young life. Where, we might ask, does reality begin and end for public sex symbols who want their "realistic" performances to be taken seriously, and for their real-life imitators, who strive to achieve glamorous artifice?

Dors in drab: publicity still for *Yield to the Night* (© 1956 Associated British Pictures). Photo courtesy of the British Film Institute: Stills, Posters and Designs.

## THE 1985 BIOPIC AS HISTORY AND ENTERTAINMENT

Thirty years after Ruth Ellis's death, *Dance with a Stranger* identified its subject directly by name, but took calculated liberties with documented facts in the process of reconstructing Ellis's last year of life. In Shelagh

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Delaney's film script, memory and fiction interweave to depict a generic loser driven to murder, following Newell's direction that Ellis's story should have "a quality of universality" (Park 175). The film's producer, Roger Randall-Cutler, said the film was to be read as "a fictional account of the love affair, with the facts of the case functioning only as a springboard for imaginative interpretation" (Park 160). According to James Park, Randall-Cutler

> saw that, by focusing on the forces that drew Ellis to her loser lover, David Blakely, from the other side of the social divide, he could make a passionate and resonant film which touched upon numerous issues relating to England in the late 1950s without getting bogged down in them, *as British filmmakers tend to do.* (159, my emphasis)

When the film was released, press reviews brought the history back into focus for the viewing public, even though the results were often somewhat idiosyncratic. In a piece that otherwise had interesting points to make about the film, David Castell, in a review in London's *Sunday Telegraph,* demonstrated how easily memory allows fiction to pass unquestioned for fact. In his careless recall of the 1956 quasi-biopic, he writes of Diana Dors appearing "in a pseudonymous account of [Ruth Ellis's] story"—factually incorrect, but reinforcing the popular belief. Castell continues, noting that "whereas *Yield to the Night* opened with her emptying her gun into her faithless lover on a Hampstead pavement, *Dance with a Stranger* ends with that scene." Although both of these statements are factually incorrect, they illustrate how deeply lodged certain graphic images of Ellis were in the imagination in 1985.

In a *Time Out* background promotional article for *Dance with a Stranger,* Richard Rayner drew his readers' attention to the interest "a squalid crime of passion" could still stimulate. "Thirty years on," Rayner continued, "the story seems more extraordinary still, a mixture of class envy, sexual jealousy and a passion that was black, poisonous and very un-English." Other critics wanted filmmakers to use Ruth Ellis as a means to examine "wider implications." Even though, in an interview with Peter Lewis of the tabloid *Sunday Express,* Randall-Cutler had made it clear that the project's emphasis was not "about who was to blame" or the death penalty, but was concerned entirely with "the drama that preceded the killing and how people get their relationships so wrong," *Times* critic Philip Strick complained that "the film argues no feminist cause, pleads no abolitionist message." *Spectator* reviewer Peter Ackroyd also took Newell to task arguing that while *Dance with a Stranger* "accurately depicted" postwar

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

society in England, and that the stereotyped Ellis was "a perfect representative of the Fifties," the film itself took no great risks in the telling. Although Ackroyd grants that "it carefully described the life of Ruth Ellis," by its narrowness of focus the film, "therefore forfeited the chance of seeing that life in a larger and more terrifying perspective." In fact, "the horror and fatality," in Ackroyd's opinion, "were underplayed here and something very close to conventional cinematic 'romance' put in their place."

When the *Sunday Express* turned its attention to Miranda Richardson, it inserted a certain heartless ambiguity into the headline "Exit Ruth Ellis, Enter a New Star" (Lewis). Details of Ellis's personality again took on special significance. As it had been for Diana Dors, this was Richardson's first big film role, and she was chosen partly because she bore a strong physical resemblance to Ruth Ellis and partly because aspects of her personality matched what the filmmakers, influenced by Hancock's biography, had seen in Ellis's character. "We wanted an unknown," Roger Randall-Cutler told *Sunday Express* reporter Peter Lewis, "so that for the audience it would be Ruth Ellis up there, not a familiar face. What we wanted to find was a bad girl with a sense of the devil." Miranda Richardson herself claimed that she could understand what Ellis must have experienced to drive her to violence. In a *Sunday Mirror* interview, Richardson described how she had immersed herself in Ellis's life patterns, including a visit to a Hampstead pub where she met Ellis's old friends. She also listened to an audio tape made by Ellis a few weeks before the murder. She was "practising her singing and rambling on about how badly David has treated her," Richardson recalled, "It sounds as though she is drinking." In considering her own role in the biopic, Richardson also contemplated the sad ineptitude of Ellis's self-fashioning, how she spent "a lot of her life play-acting," and "was often out of touch with reality." Despite all this, Richardson "did not want her to be shown as a sleazy tart who deserved everything she got." Rather, Ruth Ellis "was a vital, attractive woman who loved life" (Carr).

If *Yield to the Night* was designed to be read as melodramatic fiction, while exploiting to the full its issue of immediate social significance, the makers of *Dance with a Stranger* were equally committed to telling their story as blended fact and fiction, while striving to remain sensitive when representing the actual people involved in the case. Desmond Cussen and the Findlaters, for instance, were still alive in 1985, which Peter Ackroyd punningly acknowledged by noting that "even historical accuracy must sometimes yield to the laws of libel" (32). And yet, while this consideration must have led the filmmakers to exercise sensible caution, Park documents how Newell consciously decided to adapt historical material to create a coherent "character" modelled directly on his subject's life, but not

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanjilal Collection, Hyderabad

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

constrained by facts alone. The film had to be character driven and psychologically interesting to a public still fascinated by her, since according to Newell, Ruth Ellis as a subject "seemed to get right back to the national cortex" (Park 175). As Park notes, "the question of what distinguished Ruth Ellis from others in her circle did not interest Newell or Delaney" (178). Some of Ellis's contemporaries, for example, were written out of the evolving script, as Newell's editorializing pursued quite specific aims. Newell, for instance, deliberately "took out any women who, by presenting an alternative concept of 1950's femininity, would distract attention from Ellis's situation" (178).

The focus throughout was to be on the triangular relationship of Ellis, Blakely, and Cussen. Historical events were also shuffled around to construct tighter links between cause and effect, often connecting disparate moments. It was Newell's hope that "there should not be a single action in the story which was not motivated in the most complex kind of way that you could devise—social, character, emotional, medical" (Park 161). This is precisely what *Dance with a Stranger* communicates onscreen. In reality, difficulties accumulated rapidly but haphazardly for Ruth Ellis in her last few months of life. In the film, each scene, spare and focused on one moment, has its own upsetting logic in the script's reordered narrative progression towards catastrophe. Onscreen, events separated in time unite to prefigure disaster—like Ruth's miscarriage, linked cinematically with the breakdown of Blakely's racing car. As Randall-Cutler pointed out, "we saw some merit in both of them losing their babies" (Park 179).

## RUTH ELLIS GETS INTO PICTURES

In Newell's film Ruth Ellis and her world are conjured up through atmospheric locations and focused intimate scenes that give a sense of how circumscribed life could be in mid-Fifties' England. Blakely, already half drunk and abusive, is first introduced to Ruth by his gentler friend Desmond Cussen in the drinking club which, to her annoyance, Blakely calls "a glorified brothel." The characteristics of their evolving relationship, based on mutual aggression, jealousy, and sexual energy, are developed in the short scene of Ruth's picnic at Brand's Hatch racetrack (a composite of several occasions described by Hancock). Blakely is glimpsed talking with another woman—his fiancée-to-be in the film narrative—but when a male friend seizes the opportunity to proposition Ruth, she warns him off by saying David will hit her if he thinks she has been encouraging a rival. Ruth's nervously bright acknowledgment of Blakely's possessiveness, plus her own sharp awareness of the other woman, reinforces the dangerous instability of their relationship from the outset.

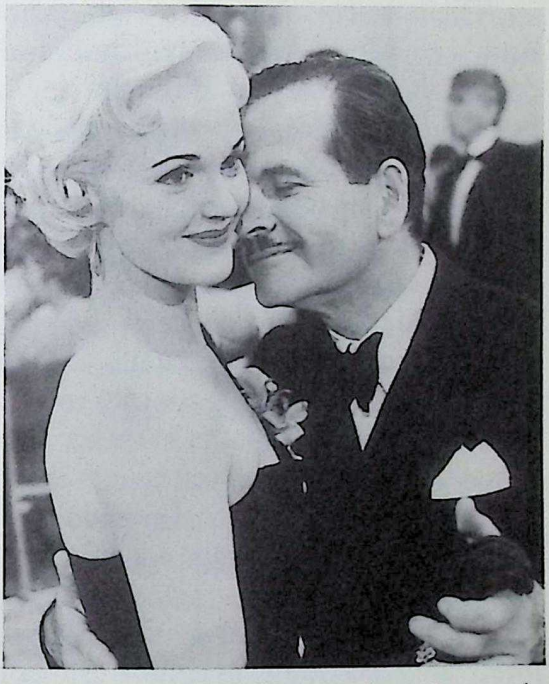
CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri
079061

Having established melodramatic parameters for the affair, the fragile couple is subjected to more stress. In one incident, Ruth angrily orders flowers to be sent to David when she hears news of his forthcoming marriage. David responds by breaking into Ruth's room at night and hurling the flowers on her bed—another composite scene based on Hancock. Later, Blakely causes a drunken fight in the Little Club, threatening Ruth's job. This is a prelude to the actual wrecking which occurs some scenes later, provoked by Blakely, but carried out by Ruth in a blind rage.

In mid-1954, while David is away with the racing team in France, Ruth, her son Andy, and Desmond Cussen take a very British-looking summer holiday, acting out an illusion of a family together at the seaside. Desmond, playing at being "husband and father," offers to pay for Andy's schooling. Ruth, clearly not playing "wife and mother," brandishes a phallic banana at the shy man, then poses suggestively on a boat for some holiday snaps. The viewer is encouraged to decode this sequence as Ruth's playful invitation to pay "in kind" for Desmond's generosity to her son. Later, in a more problematic moment for the facts in the Ellis story to which it obviously alludes, at a shooting gallery on the pier, Desmond instructs Ruth in how to take aim and fire. After a scene which has underlined their mutual attempts to manipulate each other emotionally for selfish reasons, here Ruth, Desmond, and a gun connect for the first time.

Despite Desmond's support and attention, Ruth's thoughts are seen to be elsewhere in this period of calm. At a cinema she is edgy, learning from the *Pathé News* that the British racing team has lost at Le Mans. She gazes fixedly at the screen with an inscrutable expression which the viewer guesses to be annoyance (at the team's failure) mixed with frustration (no sight of Blakely in the news footage) and apprehension (about his violent mood under the circumstances). This scene is laden with details about Ruth's obsession and sexual vulnerability. Despite being with Andy, her preoccupied gaze shows that she has not visited the cinema to please her son and, furthermore,



Richardson as Ellis, with Ian Holm as Desmond Cussen, in *Dance With a Stranger* (© 1985 Goldcrest/First Picture). Photo courtesy of the British Film Institute: Stills, Posters and Designs.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

as the lone peroxide blonde female in the almost empty theatre, she cannot help but signal sexual availability to a cruising man's casual interest.

Again devised out of several disparate moments in Hancock, a violently romantic reunion with Blakely takes place after Ruth accompanies Desmond to the British Auto-Racing Club annual ball and sees David again with his fiancée. She dances with him but leaves with Desmond, returning to her flat alone to find David waiting. Another argument ends with David claiming "I shan't have any peace till we're married," to which Ruth replies "I've never had any peace." Onscreen, the relationship enters a new level of anxiety when David attempts to take Ruth "home" to Penn, Buckinghamshire. Dressed in gaudy red, she looks obviously out of place and vulgar in contrast to the tweed-clad country gentry, who give her dismissive looks as she waits outside the village pub, which she can't enter because David fears a confrontation with his middle-class mother. Refusing to enter his family's impressive country house, Ruth asks to be taken back to London and her world. In this way, the film deliberately intensifies Ruth's sensitivity to class issues in the relationship. In reality, though, Ellis did spend nights at Penn with Blakely, and the vexed question of marriage could not be resolved anyway, because in 1954 Ellis was still waiting for her divorce—the subject of ongoing tensions, according to Hancock. In the film narrative, this crisis points to the dead end of the affair.

The mise-en-scène of the club environment frames the decisive crisis in Ruth's working life. Clearly drunk and on the brink of a nervous breakdown, she is halfway through singing "Would You Dance With A Stranger?" one evening, when David arrives with his fiancée. His jibes, which end in a fight which causes her to be fired, first ruin her work domain. Then, by preventing her from entering her own flat, he invades her last personal refuge upstairs. This is the second real crisis for Ruth in the film narrative, and significantly more serious than the first setback at Penn. The mise-en-scène alerts the viewer to the significance of this argument by locating it on the stairs, a characteristic noir location for stressful encounters. Worn out, Ruth tries to ascend, as if already on the steps of the gallows. David first blocks her way, then pushes her so that she falls to the bottom—the first of several more visual hints of falling, slumping, or hanging that prefigure her fate. Injured and stupefied by her fall, this time Ruth releases her bottled-up rage against David in an entirely self-destructive act. She goes back to the bar and smashes everything to pieces.

Such physical excess marks the beginning of Ruth's disintegration as a personality. As home, as source of income, and not least, as the setting for her calculated performance as classy noir hostess, the club has been her security. Reinforcing her psychological catastrophe onscreen is a curious

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

shot of the bead curtain through which she is seen retreating. As though visualized in pixels, her whole being is reduced to fragments.

The rest of the film turns on how the obsessively destructive relationship staggers on, even after Ruth goes to live with Desmond, trying on and off to reestablish the cheerful but fake "family life," from Christmas time to Easter 1955. In one telling scene, crucial but speculative information is presented about the murder weapon. Without directly implicating Desmond as Ruth Ellis's instigator and accomplice—which has never been proven in fact—Newell devises an innocent "moment" to reveal this possibility. Andy is seen rummaging through Desmond's room and comes across a revolver underneath the summer holiday snaps. Moments later, Desmond and Ruth burst through the door, cold after Christmas shopping and ready for a drink. They think the child has been searching for his presents, and their amused response might be that of any "ordinary" family—except that viewers now guess the significance of what Andy has actually located. Thus, the mise-en-scène leads viewers to the obvious inference that the gun Ruth will use against Blakely is Desmond's.[9]

Domesticity finally breaks down when Desmond discovers that Ruth, while living with him, is also meeting David. Desmond arranges for her to move out with Andy, but the new lodgings he provides are even seedier and smaller than his claustrophobic flat. The viewer also glimpses Ruth's dressing gown, hanging limply on a hook behind the door. Stylistically and from the narrative standpoint, then, noir-melodrama now characterizes the mise-en-scène entirely.

The antagonism David's friends, the Findlaters, may have felt towards Ruth in reality before Easter 1955 is generally soft-pedaled in the film, although their contempt for her vulgarity and manipulative pestering is expressed as the story comes to the final crisis point.[10] More problematic is how Desmond Cussen's role could be construed cinematically when Ruth's sanity is so obviously starting to slip. She expresses this lucidly enough to him just before the miscarriage scene: "I feel like my brain's trying to jump out of my head." While showing him as a protector, the film also implies that Desmond's willingness to be Ruth's taxi driver—particularly when she wants to track down David towards the end, and even though Desmond must notice how unstable she is—involves him at least as a calculating *provocateur*.

The murder scene is represented in full noir style, mostly in long shot, which diminishes the figures in the dark street and makes the entire scene look more like a stage set than reality. Ruth's psychological state is represented by an emphasis on physical details rather than the whole person.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Her bright red talons tap on the taxi window; her distorted bespectacled features are glimpsed, like the head of a monstrous fury, through an etched glass pub window. As she waits with gun in hand, she lurks in a railed garden—already behind bars. Newell's film generally follows Hancock's biographical reconstruction of the shooting, which drew on information from witnesses who had seen Ruth Ellis that night. One costume detail, however, has been changed specifically to enhance her noir persona onscreen at the crucial moment. Several witnesses swore Ellis was wearing a black outfit when she left home, yet when she was arrested she was wearing a gray two piece and green pullover. Determining where she changed her clothes therefore became vital to tracing where she might have gone to collect the gun that night. While Ruth Ellis patently lied, never explaining her change of clothes in a convincing way, the film, having already inferred that the gun is Desmond's, reconstructs the event with a definite interpretation in mind. First she is with him at home, wearing black. Then she is in the taxi—presumably Desmond's—wearing a red overcoat over the black. Though color coding is not conspicuous in this film, at a subconscious level it has reinforced the viewer's sense of Ruth's state before and after the Penn crisis. Earlier in the film her day wear colors are red and white. Later her costumes are all variations on black and white. Her final combination of black and red—passion and anger, the tones of the femme fatale—is therefore dangerously significant.

The film ends by cutting directly to Holloway Prison, indicated only by the headed notepaper on which Ruth has been writing. Prisoner 9656, or rather her well-manicured finger, checks the letter, dated 12.4.1955, laboriously pointing through a semi-literate, artfully good-mannered note of explanation to David's mother, which apologizes for causing "unpleasantness." The text her disembodied voice-over reads out is precisely what Ruth Ellis wrote a few days after detention in Holloway. Although there was actually still some time to her trial date and sentencing in June, the phrasing of her letter is calmly fatalistic, expressing her acceptance of the Old Testament logic of "an eye for an eye": "I shall die loving your son, and you should feel content that his death has been repaid" (Hancock 134–35).

In this stylized way, Newell's biopic gestures at closure via the letter. Ruth Ellis's "hand" signs her off, apparently authenticating the story that has come to a violent end. But does she know what she is doing? The viewer is forced at last to concentrate on the peculiarly inappropriate politeness of what she has written—or rather, what Ellis actually wrote—and hear the awkwardness in pitch in the voice-over. Ruth's theatrical gesture of farewell requires rigorous self-control. Although Hancock's verdict was that Ruth Ellis was "temporarily insane with jealousy and humiliation" when she

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

killed Blakely (184), *Dance with a Stranger* re-presents her finally as both deluded romantic and emotionally committed B-grade actor in her own noir scenario, determined to exit with a flourish.

* * * * *

Richardson/Ellis (© 1985 Goldcrest/First Pictures). Photo coutesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

Roger Randall-Cutler claimed that the film "never set out to explain why she did it. We simply presented the circumstances that precipitated the action, putting in sufficient evidence to substantiate an understanding of those events" (Park 183). Newell's biopic undoubtedly failed to tell the "full" story of Ruth Ellis's last years—something which she herself strove to conceal—but it did attempt a version of her life that she might well have countenanced. By constructing her in part as fiction, and situating her in a noir frame, Newell connected his subject momentarily with her lifestyle models, all the characters played by Gloria Grahame, Lana Turner, and Barbara Stanwyck. Surrounded by mirrors in which they obsessively checked their bruised beauty, these noir women would be expected to carry guns, walk through dark alleys in rough cities to assignations with feckless men, and give as good as they got in duplicity. The overlay of the conspicuously dangerous glamor of fictional romance might compensate in part for unsatisfied living. As it was, within days of the woman's execution, an effigy of Ruth Ellis in her black evening gown was on show in the Chamber of Horrors at the Blackpool waxwork exhibition, providing a new entertainment for the 1955 summer vacation crowds. An effigy of Diana Dors appeared in the same place a year later.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## NOTES

1. The idea that Ruth Ellis would be a good subject for a biopic surfaced in the mid-1970s, with the suggestion that Angie Bowie (wife of David) should play the role. The Ellis family put an end to this proposal. After two television programs about Ruth Ellis, another film proposal came up in 1980, when the *Daily Mail* of May 22 carried an interview with the aspiring actress Susannah York. A smiling photograph of the blonde star was matched with a smaller glamor shot of Ellis, as though to underline the suitability of this casting decision. "I'm very much against capital punishment and I believe that Ruth Ellis was the victim of considerable injustice," York remarks: "This is a strong issue about which a film should be made." Ruth Ellis's brother didn't agree—or as the headline read: "Brother of hanged killer says 'We've suffered enough'" (Baker). Once again the subject was dropped until Mike Newell began production a few years afterwards, with Ellis's sister's approval.
2. The general public was thus reminded forcibly on a daily basis of two other recent executions. Timothy Evans had been hanged in error in 1949, and Derek Bentley, a simple-minded, nonviolent adult accomplice, was hanged in 1953 because the actual murderer of the policeman in a robbery case was still a juvenile offender.
3. Current as a film term in more general analysis, noir-melodrama was probably coined in print by John Hill in his 1986 study *Sex, Class and Realism,* when discussing Basil Deardon's *Age of Gold* (1950).
4. For Ellis's final letters, see Hancock 135, 187.
5. As Paul Schrader puts it, "Because film noir was first of all a style, because it worked out its conflicts visually rather than thematically, because it was aware of its own identity, *it was able to create solutions to sociological problems"* (13).
6. I discussed *Yield to the Night* with Michael Craig at "Screening the Past," the Sixth Australian History and Film Conference, held in Melbourne on 3–4 December 1993, during which I chaired a session by Craig on his film career.
7. Unlike Mary Hilton, Ruth Ellis expressed her gratitude to the Holloway warders for treating her well in the death cell: "Just to let you know that I am feeling alright. The time is 7 o'clock a.m.—everyone is simply wonderful" (Hancock 187). Even though couched in the excruciatingly polite terms common to Ellis's other prison letters, this one seems to reflect a more actively humane regimen than Joan Henry's scenario depicts onscreen.
8. On the way down again in the late 1960s, Dors went bankrupt and rubbed shoulders with criminals, but her serious acting continued side by side with personal scandal. She died in 1984, the year before *Dance with a Stranger* was released.
9. Roger Randall-Cutler was motivated to make this film after a conversation with John Bickford, the solicitor in the Ellis case, who had kept the secret of her final statement, written the day before her execution. According to Bickford's information twenty-five years later, Ellis had claimed that Desmond had given her the gun (Lewis).
10. According to Hancock, the Findlaters were in reality hostile to Ruth Ellis's lifestyle. She certainly blamed them for David's neglect as the relationship deteriorated. Hancock stresses Ellis's bitterness about what she considered to be the Findlaters'

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

destructive influence on what happened not having been brought out during her trial. She had wanted them to bear some of the responsibility, and share the guilt, but they managed to escape (152–58).

## WORKS CITED


Ackroyd, Peter. "Dance in the Dark." *Spectator,* Mar. 9, 1985: 31–32.

Baker, Barry. "I'll fight Ellis Film." *Dail Mail,* May 22, 1980.

"A Camera in the Condemned Cell." *The Times,* June 18, 1956: 5.

Carr, Jean. "Deadly Dance of Passion." *Sunday Mirror,* Feb. 10, 1985: 9.

Castell, David. "Dance of Death." *Sunday Telegraph,* Mar. 3, 1985: 16.

Craig, Michael. Personal communication. "Screening the Past." Sixth Australian History and Film Conference. 3–4 December 1993. Melbourne.

Dors, Diana. *For Adults Only.* London: Star, 1978.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." *Monogram* 4 (1972): 2–15. Rpt. Gledhill. 43–69.

French, Philip. "A pitiful case." *Observer Magazine,* Mar. 3, 1985: 25.

Geraghty, Christine. "Diana Dors." *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema.* Ed. Charles Barr. London: BFI, 1986. 341–45.

Gledhill, Christine, ed. *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film.* London: BFI, 1987.

Hancock, Robert. *Ruth Ellis: The Last Woman to be Hanged.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963. Reissued 1985.

Harvey, Sylvia. "Women's Place: The Absent Families of Film Noir." Kaplan. 22–34.

Henry, Joan. *Yield to the Night.* London: Victor Gollancz, 1954. London: White Lion, 1973.

Hill, John. *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–63.* London: BFI, 1986.

Kaplan, E. Ann, ed. *Women in Film Noir.* London: BFI, 1980.

Landy, Marcia. *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930–1960.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.

Lewis, Peter. "Exit Ruth Ellis, Enter a New Star." *Sunday Express,* Feb. 3, 1985.

Newell, Mike, dir. *Dance with a Stranger.* Prod. Roger Randall-Cutler. Starring Miranda Richardson, Rupert Everett, and Ian Holm. Goldcrest/NFF/First Picture Co., 1985.

Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. "Minnelli and Melodrama." *Screen* 18.2 (1977): 113–18. Rpt. Gledhill. 70–74.

Park, James. *British Cinema: The Lights that Failed.* London: Batsford, 1990.

Pierrepoint, Albert. *Executioner: Pierrepoint.* London: Cornet, 1977.

Place, Janey. "Women in Film Noir." Kaplan. 35–67.

Rayner, Richard. "No hanging matter." *Time Out,* Feb. 21–27, 1985: 16–21.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

 Digitized 2009 by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Rodowick, David N. "Madness, Authority, and Ideology: The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s." *The Velvet Light Trap* 19 (1982): 40–45. Rpt. Gledhill. 268–80.

Schrader, Paul. "Notes on Film Noir." *Film Comment* 8.1 (Spring 1972): 8–13.

"Six peers go to see Diana Dors." *News Chronicle,* July 20, 1956.

Strick, Philip. "A triumph of seedy nostalgia." *The Times,* Mar. 1, 1985: 19.

Thompson, J. Lee. Interview. *Films and Filming* Apr. 1963: 6. Rpt. Hill. 183.

Thompson, J. Lee, dir. *Yield to the Night.* Prod. Kenneth Harper. Starring Diana Dors, Yvonne Mitchell, Michael Craig, and Marie Ney. Associated British Pictures, 1956. Released as *Blonde Sinner* in the U.S.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# MALCOLM X: IN PRINT, ON SCREEN

THOMAS DOHERTY

In a rare motion picture memory related in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* the author sits in a Michigan theater watching *Gone with the Wind* (1939). "When Butterfly McQueen went into her act," he recalls bitterly, "I felt like crawling under the rug" (32). For the young Malcolm Little, as for black Americans everywhere, the classical Hollywood screen was an inventory of negative stereotypes and a 35mm projection of white power. When the mature man came to tell his own story, he naturally turned away from the moving image and toward the written word. Appropriately then, until lately, Malcolm X has been remembered most vividly through the remarkable memoir written "with the assistance of Alex Haley," his posthumous stature due preeminently to what has for years been the most popular autobiography of an African American in print. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—not documentaries or recordings of Malcolm's speeches—preserved and assured Malcolm's legacy after his murder at the Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965.

In 1992, however, the Malcolm X of the printed page ceded pride of place, at least temporarily, to the Malcolm X of the motion picture screen. After languishing for over two decades in "development hell," *Malcolm X,* a $40 million Hollywood biopic, was released amid a torrent of hype, expectation, and skepticism. Director Spike Lee, then and now America's most ambitious and controversial African American filmmaker, billed the film as part labor of love, part declaration of conscience, and every frame his own creation. Though based on the *Autobiography* and cowritten by screenwriter Arnold Perl, Lee asserted his auteurist primacy over rival interpreters of the life of Malcolm X, whether Perl, Alex Haley, or Malcolm himself. "Malcolm X is my artistic vision," Lee proclaimed, "The film is my interpretation of the man. It is nobody else's" (xiii–xiv).

From the outset, Lee conceived of *Malcolm X* not just as a memorial to a man who had become a demi-god to many African Americans, but as a

Biography 23.1 (Winter 2000) © Biography Research Center
CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized 2008 by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

rebuke to the kind of Hollywood condescension that had so embarrassed and enraged Malcolm Little and generations of African American moviegoers. But if Lee's *Malcolm X* challenged the Hollywood tradition, it also threatened the status of the *Autobiography*. In the age of the moving image, after all, what is seen on the screen tends to erase what is read on the page. Tellingly, however, the media face-off between the two images of Malcolm X—the literary creation and the motion picture version—indicates that even in an incessantly visual culture, a portrait in literature can outlive a depiction in film.

Published in November 1965, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* has been perennially popular, selling millions of copies in paperback in the U.S. alone. At once a political tract, a religious conversion narrative, and an underground commentary on twentieth-century American culture, it has entered the restricted canon of American literary classics. Moreover, the *Autobiography* is one of the few multicultural additions to undergraduate reading lists that has not inspired the usual carping about lower admissions standards for affirmative action entries. Whether as a work of literary merit or cultural historical insight, its virtues have been self-evident.

Equally self-evident is the role the *Autobiography* has played in cementing the extraordinary prestige of Malcolm X since his death. Though today Malcolm X is paired in fame and influence with the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.—just as Spike Lee paired them in the end credit crawls to his breakthrough film, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)[1]—he ranked as a subordinate, even fringe character in 1965, known mainly as a specter haunting white America, and hardly more popular within the elite ranks of the black civil rights leadership. His list of accomplishments in legislation is nil, his message as a religious prophet is unheeded, and his one undeniable contribution as a builder of institutions served to benefit the group that engineered his assassination. Malcolm X's legacy lies in who he was and what he wrote, a presentation of self crafted in literature. In 1993, when *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* returned to the New York Times paperback best-seller list on the wave of publicity for the film, the scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defined the difference between Malcolm X and his peers. "More than Martin Luther King Jr., more than any of the black nationalists or the neo-Marxists, Malcolm X was a writer, a wordsmith" (11).[2]

Of course, like Malcolm X, the *Autobiography* has never been free of controversy. Criticism swirls around two familiar problem points with the genre of autobiography: the question of authorship and of fidelity to history. The precise nature of the creative collaboration between Malcolm X and Alex Haley awaits full examination of the original manuscript, auctioned off by the Haley estate in 1992, but reportedly awash in marginal notations

CC-0. Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri Collection, Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

in red pencil from Malcolm over syntax, word choice, factual details, and narrative ordering.[3] Yet, however the credit is finally parceled out between subject and amanuensis, the work is manifestly more in tune with Malcolm's voice and vision, more an authentic expression of the man, than most "as told to" or ghosted memoirs, such as Tina Turner's *I, Tina: My Life Story* (1987), written with Kurt Loder, or Colin Powell's *My American Journey* (1995), written with Joseph E. Persico.

Questions about the work as a truthful account of Malcolm X's life are less easily shunted aside. By the measure of autobiography, the most notoriously untrustworthy of genres, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is no less a work of hindsighted reconstruction, strategic omission, and outright fabrication than, say, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin.* By the measure of the slave narratives of the nineteenth century, however, works whose verifiable authenticity was yoked to their political purpose and moral meaning, the *Autobiography* is more troubling. This is why the duplicities alleged in Bruce Perry's revisionist *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America,* published in 1991, have cut so deeply. "For personal and political reasons [Malcolm's] public image was carefully constructed," Perry contends: "Its exaggerated portrayal of his youthful criminality enhanced his tough image and characterized the transformation of the pseudo-masculine, criminal Malcolm into the manly, political Malcolm" (ix). Perry marshals evidence that contradicts Malcolm's account of his father's death, his criminal past, and most damningly, the firebombing of his house in 1965. (Just as the Nation of Islam charged, Perry implies it was an act of arson committed by Malcolm himself.) Less seriously, Perry reports that despite Malcolm's reported chagrin during *Gone with the Wind,* he was "addicted to the movies" as a young man, viewing "as many as five a day." Malcolm Little not only "loved the Hollywood tough guys," but enjoyed the all-black musicals *Stormy Weather* (1943) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) (72).

Whatever the outcome of scholarly debates over authorship and historical assaults on the integrity of the narrator, it seems unlikely to detract from the popularity of the tale. No wonder: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* tells a traditional American story with direct links to at least three venerable literary genres. Like Benjamin Franklin, Malcolm X is, in John Cawelti's phrase, an apostle of the self-made man. Like Frederick Douglass, Malcolm journeys from slavery to freedom in a kind of twentieth-century slave narrative. Like Puritan fathers from Jonathan Edwards to Tom Dooley, he experiences a Damascus-like moment of conversion, and dedicates himself to missionary work among the infidels. Linking all three tropes is the theme of literacy, an almost religious reverence for the redemptive power of the printed word as the path to salvation and self-transformation.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

As with the antebellum slave narrative, the formal strengths and incisive insights of the *Autobiography* give the lie to racist ideology. *Mirabile dictu*—the black man can think, write, and analyze. Yet the work defied another image, a new African American stereotype that Malcolm himself helped forge. The stance of the literary Malcolm refuted the hot television image of the angry demagogue showcased in documentaries such as WNTA's *The Hate That Hate Produced* (1959) and ABC's *Walk in My Shoes* (1961).[4] Significantly, Malcolm X's arrival on the national scene was concurrent not only with the renascent civil rights movement, but with a series of pivotal shifts in the nature of television journalism: the consolidation of three-network hegemony in the late 1950s, the extension of nightly newscasts from fifteen minutes to thirty minutes in September 1963, and the high renaissance of the prime time television documentary. Telegenic and quick witted, Malcolm courted the networks like a smitten suitor, and relished his verbal duels with patrician white broadcasters. As the critic Shelby Steele noted, Malcolm X spoke in sound bites before the term was invented, and used blunt street talk to punch through the fog of pretense, politeness, and euphemism on television.

For many Americans the first look at Malcolm X on screen came in the five-part series on the Nation of Islam entitled *The Hate That Hate Produced,* a production of New York station WNTA's *Newsbeat* program hosted by Mike Wallace. Billed as "a study of black racism," and focusing on "a Negro religious group who call themselves the Muslims," the series was originally telecast over the week of July 13–17, 1959, but it caused so much stir that an edited overview was broadcast on July 22, 1959, with a post-screening discussion featuring less threatening black leaders such as Jackie Robinson and Roy Wilkens.[5] Though Wallace assures viewers that "sober minded Negroes" reject the "black racism" of the "Negro dissenters," he cautions, "let no one underestimate the Muslims."

After some exposition on the Nation of Islam and film clips of Elijah Mohammed, the program zeroes in on the colorful figure naturally "of more interest to New Yorkers," Minister Malcolm X. "He is a remarkable man," admits Wallace, tracking a spiritual trajectory that the *Autobiography* would later flesh out:

> A man who by his own admission was once a procurer and dope peddler. He served time for robbery in the Michigan and Massachusetts state penitentiaries. But now he is a changed man. He will not smoke or drink. He will not even eat in a restaurant that houses a tap. He told *Newsbeat* that his life changed for him when the Muslim faith taught him no longer to be ashamed of being a black man.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Interviewed onscreen by the African American journalist and writer Louis E. Lomax, Malcolm comes across as assured and animated. He calmly lays down the Nation of Islam line, reinterpreting the Book of Genesis to finger the white man as the snake in the Garden of Eden. Though placed alongside other black leaders (Elijah Mohammed, John Davis, and Adam Clayton Powell), Malcolm warrants the lengthiest biographical sketch. Toward the close of the program, Wallace again reminds viewers of Malcolm's dope peddler/procurer/convict past, perhaps to plant the idea that his role of minister is less a new life than a new con. By contrast, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, with his finger on the pulse of the Harlem vox populi, calls Malcolm "a very brilliant man." Wallace laments the success of the Black Muslims as "tragic irrefutable evidence" that many Negroes are "losing faith in the American dream," and "consider themselves Americans of African descent." Exhibit A is a sequence showing Malcolm at the pulpit, electrifying a congregation of once sober-minded Negroes at Powell's Harlem church.

It was the angry black man on the television screen that Malcolm's postmortem *Autobiography* forced Americans to see anew. The physical feature Malcolm fixated on in his most famous characterization of the opposition—"the blue-eyed devils"—pinpoints the site of contention. For Malcolm, the eyes reflected the white man's perceptible failures of vision, eyes that saw him but did not perceive him, an intimation linking the *Autobiography* to that other great literary expression of African American culture in the postwar era, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.* First presented on television, next represented in print, and finally projected on the motion picture screen, the popular image of Malcolm X has developed in three stages of multiple exposure: the televisual face transmitted on the small screen, the literary self conjured by the autobiography, and the motion picture incarnation fashioned by Spike Lee for the theatrical screen and videotape afterlife.[6]

To be sure, prior to the release of *Malcolm X,* Malcolm's dynamic screen presence had remained before American eyes in archival documentaries on the civil rights movement, and in montages of assassinated leaders from the 1960s. Most notably, Marvin Worth and Arnold Perl's same-titled *Malcolm X* (1972), a kind of documentary precursor to the Spike Lee biopic, showcased Malcolm's screen magnetism to an audience that may have missed it the first time around. Though not widely distributed in its day—*Variety*'s bottom-line prediction proved accurate: "commercial outlook will be spotty" ("*Malcolm X*")—and seldom seen today, the film retrieved many of the best clips of Malcolm and thereby provided in later years a convenient secondary source for news reports on Malcolm's impact.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Worth and Perl's *Malcolm X* opens "cold," with a close-up of Malcolm at the podium delivering his terse "by any means necessary" promise while a protean rap tune ("Niggers Are Scared of Revolution" by the Last Poets) is mixed over a montage of contemporary African American life. (Perhaps another reason for the cold opening, without title credits, is that the names of filmmakers Marvin Worth and Arnold Perl do not exactly bespeak African roots.) Eschewing the standard "Voice of God" commentary, the documentary is structured around passages from the *Autobiography* as read by James Earl Jones: the death of Malcolm's father, a childhood shadowed by the Great Depression (a soft, lovely interlude unfolding to Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child"), a youth spent Lindy Hopping in Boston and Harlem, and so on. One sequence is uniquely suited to cinematic elaboration. When Malcolm X extols the value of an all-black education "minus the little black sambo," a montage of Hollywood stereotypes unfurls—bug-eyed spooks, tongue-tied servants, and Stepin Fetchit himself. The ugly pageant serves not only as visual history lesson, but as striking juxtaposition to the vital screen presence at the center of the documentary that is *Malcolm X*. Framed close up in big screen celluloid, whether in black and white or full color, Malcolm radiates the charisma of a motion picture star of the first magnitude.

As *Malcolm X* chronicles the growing fame of its subject, Malcolm's life increasingly becomes a self-conscious public performance. He falters only once. Besieged by squadrons of journalists with sharp questions and open microphones, he makes a glib remark that stops his forward momentum when another series of archival images intrudes—the funeral cortege of John F. Kennedy. Malcolm's infamous wisecrack that the president's murder was "a case of the chickens coming home to roost" led to his disciplinary "silencing" for ninety days by Elijah Mohammed, and in time, to Malcolm's permanent estrangement from the Nation of Islam. Even so, his sparring with reporters tends to be good natured and high spirited, with each side enjoying the battle of wits. Making his first public statement after his ninety-day silencing, he jokes to an interviewer that if he is talking too fast it is because he has been silent for so long.

In a resonant shift of scene, the urban, American interiors of *Malcolm X* are replaced by the desert landscapes of the Middle East. Malcolm's trip to Mecca inspires a stunning spiritual transformation. "We are truly the same," Malcolm states flatly, acknowledging that "many white people are fed up" with the treatment of the black man. To his former critic Mike Wallace, he asserts, "I never did hate." Most ominously, he assails Elijah Mohammed and reveals the reason for his break with the Nation of Islam: that Elijah Mohammed has fathered illegitimate children with teenage girls.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The preordained climax to the documentary is no less shocking for being expected. In the aftermath of Malcolm's bloody assassination, reporters badger Betty Shabazz, still in a state of shock. Carefully worded responses are delivered by Elijah Mohammed (Malcolm was "a victim of his own preaching") and Martin Luther King, Jr. ("an unfortunate tragedy"). A series of interviews with the people of Harlem better reflects the esteem from the street and the prevailing sentiment of the black community that Malcolm's death was orchestrated by, or committed with the connivance of, the New York Police Department and the FBI.

After Worth and Perl's *Malcolm X,* twenty years passed before motion pictures of Malcolm X again filled the theatrical screen. The release of Lee's *Malcolm X* on November 18, 1992, was a tribute to the tenacity of two men: Marvin Worth, the producer of the 1972 documentary, who had been pitching the project around Hollywood since 1966, and Spike Lee, who made it his personal business after hearing that the white, Jewish Canadian filmmaker Norman Jewison was in line to direct the biopic of the black, Muslim African American. How much of the long gestation can be attributed to Hollywood racism, how much to the usual difficulties in putting together a decent script and a salable package, is hard to determine, but not until Malcolm's stature reached a kind of critical mass in American no less than African American culture could the project have been green-lighted. "It's been a long journey getting to this point," Worth commented upon the film's release, sounding more weary than victorious, "It's rewarding to finally be making a film about [Malcolm's] life."[7]

Lee's travails in bringing *Malcolm X* to the screen are chronicled in his tie-in book, *By Any Means Necessary: The Trials and Tribulations of the Making of Malcolm X.* "The static, the resistance came from everywhere," Lee claimed: "Presently in America a war is being fought. Forget about guns, planes, and bombs, the weapons from now on will be the newspapers, magazines, TV shows, radio, and FILM" (xiii, xiv). The all-capital highlighting of the motion picture medium underscores the strange omission of the source material: the book entitled *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* When his story finally did become a major motion picture, the grainy Malcolm of archival memory and the Malcolm of the *Autobiography* surrendered media dominance to an eclectic array of new visual representations: not just Malcolm X the movie, but Malcolm X the product. A flood of saturation imagery and ancillary marketing items swept in with the film, including X-marked caps, shirts, jackets, posters, coffee cups, and air fresheners.[8] Malcolm's rebirth as pop icon was a curious makeover for a self-described man of letters whose affinities were so emphatically print-based, whose faith in the transforming power of literacy was almost mystical.

CC-0. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection.

 Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The Iconic X: In the wake of Spike Lee's biopic, a political cartoon comments on the ubiquity of the brandname signage. (Cartoon courtesy of Kevin Spiers, *The Charlotte Observer* © 1993).

In the film's title no less than in the man's surname, Malcolm's "X" retained its almost talismanic force as an alphabetic sign with multiple significance. X is the mark of the illiterate, the mark of negation, and the mark of the condemned film. For director Lee and African American film buffs, the obliterating "X" logo, a negation with a positive value, also spotlights a precise cinematic referent. Typographically, the mark conjures the publicity tagline for Melvin Van Peebles's seminal "blaxploitation" picture, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971): "Rated X by an all white jury!" Finally, the X provided the brandname signage for the film's newspaper advertising and one-sheet posters. Crisscrossed between the upper arms of the X, a litany of identities labeled this most malleable of American self-made men: Scholar, Convict, Leader, Disciple, Hipster, Father, Hustler, Minister, Black Man, Every Man.

Not even that list exhausted the models coloring the cinematic backstory, however. Just as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was read by the light of classic American literature, *Malcolm X* unspooled in the shadow of one of Hollywood's most durable motion picture genres: the biopic. During the classical studio era, the biopic thrived by celebrating the great (white) men of science, politics, and the arts, and the loyal women who stood behind them. While adhering to the rigorous codes of the Hays

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Office, screenwriters discovered wellsprings of romantic yearnings and dedicated altruism in the lives of loveless inventors and narcissistic writers. Well-known anecdotes of the great man's life—Alexander Graham Bell reaching out to touch Watson, young Tom Edison getting his ears boxed, Alvin York wetting his rifle sight at a turkey shoot—validated the authenticity of the screen incarnation even as blemishes in the public image were brushed over to fit commercial necessity and censorial oversight.

At their most fanciful, the bloated melodramas of Hollywood's classical era gave celluloid biography a bad name. Writ large for the big screen, the grandiose biopics from Warner Bros. (*The Story of Louis Pasteur* [1936]) and *The Life of Emile Zola* [1937]) and MGM (*Young Tom Edison* [1940] and *Edison the Man* [1940]) were canvases for breathless romance, extravagant set design, and forward narrative thrust, not historical retrieval and psychological insight. Moral lapses, character flaws, and unmentionable proclivities were tactfully omitted from Hollywood's lives of the secular saints—hence the brilliant military strategist General George Armstrong Custer in *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), and the virile heterosexual composer Cole Porter in *Night and Day* (1946).

Not until the mid-1950s did the biopic become more critical, intrusive, and skeptical. Propelled by the popular dissemination of Freudian psychology and the decline of Hays Office censorship, a new breed of biopic exposed the lives of great men, warts and all: Vincent Van Gogh's demonic *Lust for Life* (1956), baseball player Jimmy Piersall's oedipal hitting slumps in *Fear Strikes Out* (1957), and the founder of psychoanalysis's need for his own treatment in *Freud* (1962).[9]

From an African American perspective, however, the generic progress of the biopic occurred in the motion picture equivalent of an all-white neighborhood.[10] Where the Hollywood biopic tradition is varied and complex, the specifically African American models are sparse and one-dimensional. The few exceptions prove the rule: *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), *The Joe Louis Story* (1953), and *St. Louis Blues* (1958), the story of W. C. Handy, were all noteworthy products of a postwar atmosphere congenial to civil rights, but though there was a *Glenn Miller Story* in 1955, and a *Benny Goodman Story* in 1956, there was no *Duke Ellington Story* in 1957. In crafting *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* the writers Malcolm X and Alex Haley might draw for inspiration on a rich literary tradition. In creating *Malcolm X,* the filmmaker Spike Lee started virtually from scratch.

*The Joe Louis Story,* the biopic of another African American son of Detroit, illustrates the restrictions operative in even the most well-intentioned depictions of a black hero. Consigned to limited release due to its

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

African American subject matter, and the product of white filmmakers (producer Stirling Silliphant, director Robert Gordon, and screenwriter Robert Sylvester), the tale opens with newsreel footage of the lion in winter: Louis's sorrowful swan song against Rocky Marciano, in an ill-advised return to the ring, the once indomitable champion trading his cultural capital for a desperately needed payday. After Louis's defeat, a sympathetic white reporter sits down at his typewriter to write the elegy for the great fighter. It is the white reporter's words and narrative voice-over that structure the spectator's vantage on *The Joe Louis Story.* Denied a voice in his own story, played clumsily by the astonishingly lookalike but manifestly ineffectual novice actor Coley Wallace, Louis seems an empty vessel, a man with no psychological motivation or interior intellectual life.[11] The matter of race—even the sobriquet "Brown Bomber"—is handled so discreetly that an inattentive viewer might never know that Joe Louis was black.

Passing mentions are made of the fact that a "colored man" has two strikes against him in the fight game, and that he is "a credit to the human race," but even during the reenactments and authentic newsreel footage of Louis's epochal fights with Max Schmeling, the extra-ring stakes in the bout between the Nazi Übermensch and the African American are barely acknowledged—perhaps not to belabor the meaning of a sports event alive in the memory of the 1953 audience, perhaps to avoid any uncomfortable domestic comparisons. In the final seconds of *The Joe Louis Story,* as the defeated champ walks into the urban night under the glow of the marquee of Madison Square Garden, the white reporter, not the black protagonist, gets the last word in voice-over: "And from me, who knows him better than most, I can see a beginning not an end. And from all of us tonight, Champ —good luck!"

With that biopic background, Lee's resolution to wrest the means of production from Hollywood, to insist on the prerogatives of control and final cut due an auteur, seems less an act of artistic temperament than cultural self-determination. Due in no small part to Lee's crafty and well-publicized pose as an activist/auteur under siege from studio philistines, *Malcolm X* attained the status of a high profile cultural event well before its official release date. Even for a synergistic entertainment industry where saturation marketing and full-throttle exploitation is normative behavior, the publicity wraparound for *Malcolm X*—from CBS specials to MTV rock blocks—was relentless.

After so mammoth a buildup, the arrival of the film was met with a deluge of commentary in op-ed pages and news magazines. In the main, the critical response to *Malcolm X* was quite favorable, ranging from wildly

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

enthusiastic ("Smashing. An event movie that lives up to the event!" blurbed Mike Clark in *USA Today*) to admiringly respectful ("not exactly the equal, or even the equivalent of the book, but it is an ambitious, tough, seriously considered biographical film that, with honor, eludes easy characterization," ruminated Vincent Canby in the *New York Times*).

To adjudge *Malcolm X* fairly, with the benefit of some hindsight, and without the fog of the hype of the moment, demands (at least) a studied avoidance of the dreary gambit whereby the film version of an esteemed book is inevitably deemed to be organically less satisfying in psychological depth, symbolic texture, and thematic complexity than the print inspiration. But even allowing that a film is an autonomous artwork to be taken on its own, the backstory from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is so pervasive, its narrative trajectory and signature scenes so well known, that Lee's *Malcolm X* assumes not only a familiarity with the predecessor text, but draws on it for emotional ballast and narrative orientation. No less than the director, the knowing spectator reads the film through the pages of the book.

*Malcolm X* begins with a blunt juxtaposition of elements that are at once religious (Islamic/Jewish), racial (black/white), and economic (black workers/white owners)—though, for once, black economic and artistic aspirations drown out the buzz of white corporate power. Even as the Warner Bros. logo fills the screen, the voice of a Nation of Islam adherent praises Elijah Mohammed and introduces Minister Malcolm X, whose voice booms on the soundtrack with his trademark "I charge the white man" litany of historical grievances. A huge American flag supplants the Warner Bros. shield, like the opening of *Patton* (1970), dominating every inch of screen space. The still image of the flag is intercut, and cut up, with videotape images from the Rodney King beating of March 3, 1991, the grainy camcorder recording looking blurry and otherworldly when blown up to 35mm celluloid. Flames ignite around the edges of the flag, eating away to the heart of the cloth, engulfing everything in tongues of fire except a red, white, and blue, stars-and-striped X, defiantly ablaze.

The story proper opens with a leisurely crane shot swooping in on a period recreation of Boston during the war years, a vibrant street scene bathed in a mellow sepia-toned sunlit glow—the first glimpse of a recurrent chiaroscuro effect that might be termed "high yellow" lighting. The establishing shot tracks on to the familiar figure of Spike Lee, playing Malcolm's sidekick Shorty, decked out in flamboyant zoot suit threads, strutting down the street like a peacock, arms sashaying in tempo at his side. Lee the director cuts away from Lee the actor to a barbershop interior, where Malcolm (Denzel Washington) emerges to receive his first "konk

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

job," an act of initiation into urban Negro-dom that is one of the great set pieces from the *Autobiography* and the metaphor for Malcolm's psychological submission to the white world. "Make it straight," he urges, willing to trade the pain of the lye burning into his skull for a caucasian feature. "Looks white, don't it?" he beams with satisfaction afterwards, looking at his false image in the mirror.

Though the curtain raises on Malcolm's young manhood in Boston, the three act structure of the *Autobiography* determines the narrative trajectory of the biopic, moving through Malcolm's identities as street hustler, Nation of Islam proselytizer, and independent, reborn preacher after his haj to Mecca. Both the retrospective cast of *Malcolm X* and the offscreen shadow of the *Autobiography* are emphasized by the first intrusion of an offscreen voice-over from the reformed Malcolm, recalling his reprobate life. Moments after the konk job sequence, a freeze frame locks Malcolm's image on screen, and the sober voice of Denzel Washington communicates a sane, reflective sensibility that can come only from the mature man and the pages of the *Autobiography*. This (offscreen) man is no longer the grinning fool in the glad rags frozen in his false consciousness.

"When my mother was pregnant with me, a party of Klansmen on horseback surrounded our house in Omaha, Nebraska," Washington/Malcolm intones, cueing the first flashback, a visitation from white-robed nightriders straight out of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), though D. W. Griffith's heroes are Spike Lee's demons. Throughout *Malcolm X,* a contemporary crisis triggers a flashback to the background that has warped the adult man. On film, as in the mind of Malcolm, the American racist past is present.

As Malcolm confesses in his *Autobiography,* one legacy of that past is the seductive allure of white women for the black man. In an eyeline match from across the floor of the Roseland Ballroom, Malcolm fixes his gaze on a backlit vision of the blonde Sophia (Kate Vernon), whose cream-colored convertible and lily-white flesh make irresistible objects of cinematic attraction. The sexual politics of the two women in Malcolm's life, the blonde temptress Sophia and the black sister Betty (Angela Bassett), express the most extreme of whore-virgin oppositions: Sophia is sexual, aggressive, greedy, and vapid; Betty is chaste, quiet, caring, and aggressive only when her family is threatened.

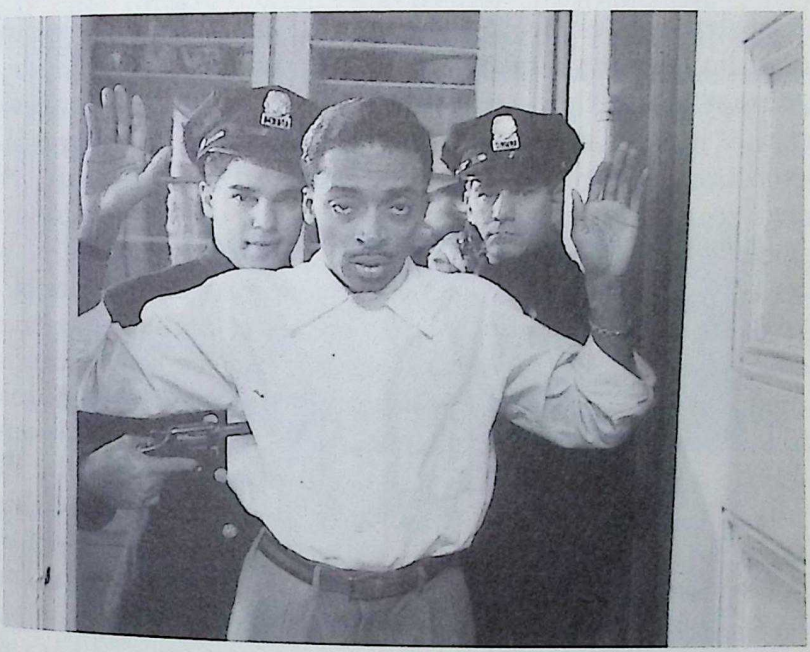
In Harlem, Malcolm hooks up with his mentor in crime, West Indian Archie (Delroy Lindo), who teaches him how to dress, run numbers, and snort cocaine. In both the Boston and Harlem passages of Malcolm's unregenerate life, Lee the director luxuriates in the high life of a big budget prestige project from Hollywood—lavish production numbers, panoramic crowd scenes, and precision recreations of period detail in set design, props,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and wardrobes. The showstopping sequence is an elaborately choreographed dance number in the Roseland Ballroom. Swinging and Lindy Hopping to a live Big Band, ecstatic dancers leap in line, all gyrating in perfect coordination, as in a vintage Hollywood musical. A tastefully chosen soundtrack of period music sets the mood and comments on the action—the original tunes by the original performers, the kind of material whose copyright permissions do not come cheap, among them Joe Turner, Billie Holiday, Jackie Wilson, and the whitebread Perry Como. When West Indian Archie and his goons come to kill Malcolm, ousting him from his table while Billie Holiday performs "Big Stuff," his last request is they leave "after Billie finishes"—and though he is hustled out before her song ends, Holiday's voice lingers on the soundtrack as Malcolm frantically flees from his attackers.

After his brush with death, Malcolm hightails it back to Boston. In another freeze-framed moment of retrospective clarity, Malcolm X's voice-over describes the creature he had become to support his drug habit, high living, and white woman: "I was an animal." During another konk job—again, a set piece from the *Autobiography*—the shutting off of the kitchen faucets robs him of the water to douse the pain of the lye. Desperate, Malcolm dunks his head in the toilet just as the police bust in: "The jig is up," says Shorty, calling down the curtain on the first act.



The auteur as actor: director Spike Lee under the gun as Malcolm X's sidekick, Shorty (From the Warner Bros. Press Kit for *Malcolm X*, © 1992 Warner Bros. Photo by David Lee.).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya

 Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

As in the *Autobiography,* physical imprisonment leads to spiritual liberation. Brought to the words of Elijah Mohammed by the gentle ministrations of the convict Baines (Albert Hall), Malcolm Little becomes Malcolm X. In a duplicitous set up, Lee depicts Elijah Mohammed (Al Freeman, Jr.) through Malcolm's blissed out perspective. Suffused with a divine aura, the Nation of Islam leader first appears as a God incarnate, materializing in a golden chair in Malcolm's cell, beaming wisdom and promising salvation. Later, when Malcolm realizes that the "slander" from the white press about Elijah Mohammed's philandering is all too true, even a spectator prewarned by the *Autobiography* may feel something of Malcolm's disillusionment in the man who was his savior. To the director's credit, and despite the well-publicized fact that members of the Nation of Islam provided security for the film during location shooting in New York City, Lee did not whitewash the reputation of the leader.

For the final act, Lee milks the Hitchcockian suspense of anticipating an event whose climax is known in advance. On the soundtrack Jackie Wilson's "A Change Is Gonna Come" wafts over the action as Malcolm X stoically prepares to meet his fate. An old black woman tells the distracted man that Jesus will protect him, but he knows otherwise. Lee saves his trademark vertiginous shot almost to the end. The stationary Malcolm X stands center screen, pinned in the vortex of history, as the background swirls woozily around him. "It's a time for martyrs," he mutters to a companion backstage at the Audubon Ballroom.

The murder sequence is fast and brutal. A staged scuffle distracts the crowd, two shotgun blasts bring Malcolm down, and a fusillade of handgun fire pumps into his prostrate body. In the chaos and confusion of the aftermath, Lee jump cuts into a free-for-all frenzy of running and shouting while Betty cries hysterically over her husband's slain figure. A fruitless ambulance race to the hospital is followed by the blunt announcement from a spokesman that "Malcolm X is no more." Ironically, where the depictions of Malcolm's spiritual transformations and political declamations tend to be static, the assassination sequence comes alive on screen.

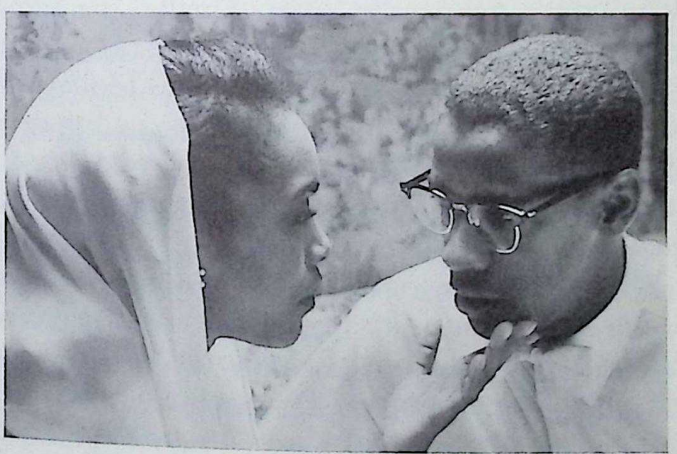
Whether for reasons of political expediency or legal liability, Elijah Mohammed is never personally implicated in the assassination. Instead, Lee blames Malcolm X's murder on a vague cadre of jealous "ministers" acting, presumably, in collusion with white police power—perhaps the FBI, or the CIA, or the NYPD. "They're not working alone—they're getting a lot of help," Malcolm concludes before his death. The personification of the conspiracy theory is a white police captain played by Peter Boyle, an icon of blue-collar bigotry since *Joe* (1970). After witnessing Malcolm's power over a huge crowd of street demonstrators, the captain says, "That's too much power for one man to have." He reappears in the aftermath of the assassination and seems to scan the Audubon Ballroom with some satisfaction.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Unwilling to turn up the lights with the hero lying dead on the stage, Lee concludes *Malcolm X* with an extended tribute sequence. In voice-over, the actor Ossie Davis recites his moving eulogy to Malcolm ("Malcolm was our manhood, our living black manhood"), while newsreel images and still photos show the real Malcolm X, smiling, vibrant, alive. On the soundtrack a heavenly choir vocalizes soothingly.

Despite its undeniable power to move individual spectators, and for all its laudable motives, *Malcolm X* came to be the kind of prestige project more respected than enjoyed: a 201-minute hagiography that possessed all too little of the energy, passion, or wit of the man who inspired it. Against the fast pace, sharp asides, and direct trajectory of the *Autobiography,* the motion picture meandered, straightfaced and dour. Where Malcolm and Haley conjured the seductions of the unregenerate life with unrepentant glee, Lee's depiction of Malcolm's "Detroit Red" years as a young hustler in Boston and Harlem plays out as flat and joyless. The scenic backdrop to sin—music, dance, and fashion—should be congenial to the screen, but the reckless, reprobate Malcolm idles in neutral, and the earnest, ascetic Malcolm is often still and didactic. In this sense, the casting of Denzel Washington may have worked against half of the performance. Though his dignified bearing suited the portrayal of the converted Malcolm, the sober actor is difficult to imagine as the unhinged hustler who gets high on coke and bluffs his way through a game of Russian roulette. Not least, much of the sly humor of the book was bleached out of the film. The exceptions are welcome, if rare: Shorty's wisecrack to the converted Malcolm that he could never become a Muslim because he likes pig's feet and white women too much, or the irreverent exchange between two FBI men wiretapping the phone conversations between Malcolm and his wife, Betty Shabazz. "Compared to King," cracks one agent, "this guy's a monk."



A chaste match: Betty Shabazz (Angela Bassett) and Malcolm X (Denzel Washington as the idealized Nation of Islam couple (From the Warner Bros. Press Kit for *Malcolm X* ©1992 Warner Bros. Photo by David Lee.)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Moreover, a major portion of the film's running time is given over t ritual reenactments, not just of passages read or depicted from the *Aut biography,* but of verbatim recitations of speeches, press conferences, an letters. Again and again, images of the archival Malcolm X are restaged, ges ture for gesture, note for note, as if the director feels his biopic will be th only record of the man to pass down to future generations, and that, in th fullness of time, scholarly completion will be more salient than judiciou cutting. Sometimes splicing together color and black and white footage o precisely the same scene, Lee shifts back and forth from dramatic to docu dramatic styles for visual variety, but no matter how dynamic the perform ance and the crowd enthusiasm, the ritual reenactments still play like hec toring from the screen. Given this extensive homage to the archival record a series of abrupt flash forwards to the historical present seems jarringly incongruous: the Rodney King video at the top of the film, the appearance of the Reverend Al Sharpton in a Harlem Street scene from the 1950s, and Nelson Mandela speaking to a classroom in the closing coda. A film that strives for historical verisimilitude by faithfully replicating period set design and reenacting speeches line-for-line is ill-advised to shatter the narrative illusion with a distancing device that thrusts the viewer out of the fiction and into the present. The flamboyant figure of Al Sharpton, flourishing a konk job that would shame Detroit Red, breaks the biopic frame with the force of a real life Forrest Gump seamlessly matched into newsreel footage.

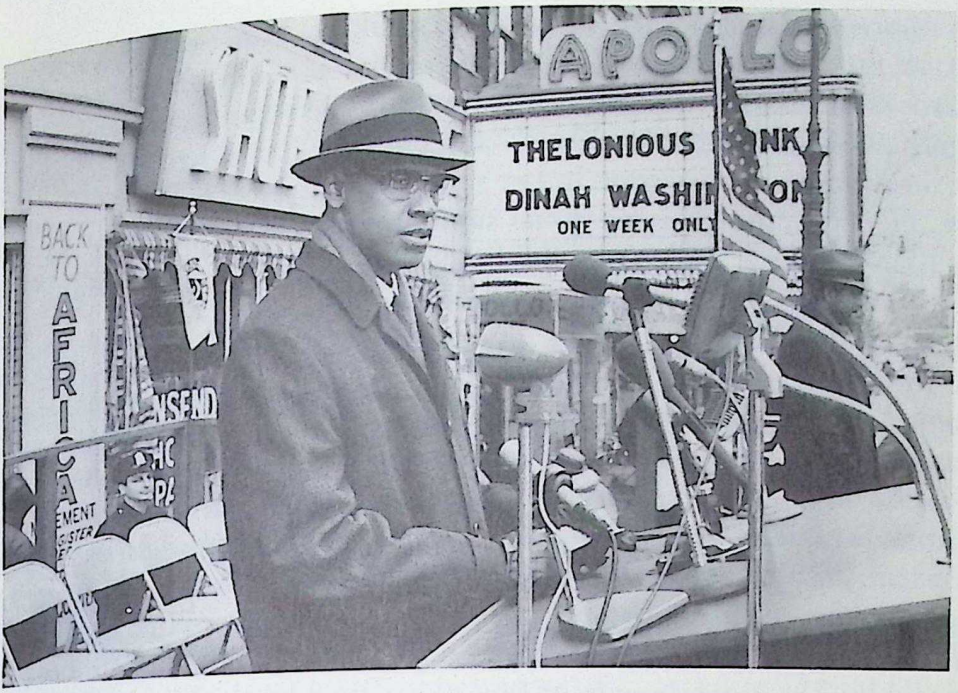
To be fair, Malcolm's moments of enlightenment by way of prayer and the printed word do not make promising source material for exciting screen drama. Notwithstanding a tense scene where Malcolm and his fellow inmate Baines search Webster's Dictionary for the color-coded etymology of the words "black" and "white," the acts of reading and writing are almost by definition, cinematically inert. Finally, the film's post-production troubles are reflected in some technical flaws—badly lit and mismatched shots—that are unusual in a big-budget Hollywood production.

Little wonder that despite critical esteem and a big opening week, the film's box office gross declined sharply in the second week, and ultimately fell far short of the anticipated commercial pay off (in the six weeks following its opening, it grossed $45 million). According to a marketing postmortem by Warner Bros. executives, the daunting combination of the film's three-hour-plus running time and Lee's severe message-mongering doomed *Malcolm X* with audiences who resisted "a tedious history lesson as opposed to dramatic entertainment" (Weinraub).

For his part, Lee was worried about more than box office returns. Despite his name-above-the-title braggadocio, the director knew he would

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri




Dignified bearing and historical detail: Denzel Washington in character as Malcolm X (From the Warner Bros. Press Kit for *Malcolm X* ©1992 Warner Bros. Photo by David Lee.)

be answerable to rival claimants with a vested interest in the legacy of Malcolm X. The biopic needed to remain true to the spirit of the book and give due honor to the man, else alienate the target audience the director sought most to cultivate—his fellow African Americans.

Whether from a failure of nerve or because Malcolm X's version of events accorded so perfectly with Lee's own political and cinematic vision, the director opted for a deferential fidelity to the *Autobiography* rather than an independent inquiry into a contested life. Ironically for a self-styled Hollywood iconoclast and outsider, Lee assumed a reverent stance harkening back to the studio system biopics of the 1930s. In fact, the cycle of biopics that began with the pious Gandhi (1982), and peaked with the quartet from 1991–1992—*JFK, Malcolm X, Hoffa,* and *Chaplin*—regressed *back* a generation to the worshipful spirit of Warner Bros. and MGM, rather than to the wary skepticism of the biopics of the 1950s and 1960s. In *JFK,* Jim Garrison is the lone crusader for truth in an ocean of corruption and conspiracy. In *Hoffa,* the labor boss is a fearless protector of the working man and a fierce defender of civil liberties against bloated robber barons and a sniveling Robert Kennedy. In *Chaplin,* the priapic tramp is a transcendent genius who falls victim to Puritanism and McCarthyism.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*Malcolm X* is no less reverent and credulous. Following the script laid out in the *Autobiography,* Lee portrays Malcolm's first encounter with racism as beginning while he is literally in his mother's womb, during the nighttime assault by the Ku Klux Klan. The fire that is the central image of the book finds apt expression in Lee's own primary colors, the blue and yellow color scheme that is his visual signature. Fire—the element that links the Klan's arson of Malcolm's childhood home and the firebombing of his own house days before his death—illuminates the arc of his life. The flames symbolize too the threat that "by any means necessary" is the fire next time.

In the last moments of *Malcolm X,* Lee collapses distinctions between drama and documentary by unspooling archival footage of the man just dramatized in fiction. A valedictory montage intercuts clips of the real Malcolm with a montage of black school children ("I'm Malcolm X!" they chirp in turn), and a cameo appearance from Nelson Mandela. Perhaps the desperate blizzard of screen images—video and film, real and reenacted—expresses the director's recognition that the motion picture medium has fallen short of the mark, that the story of Malcolm X has, after all, been better told by *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* than by the biopic *Malcolm X*.

## NOTES

1. After the cathartic act of violence that climaxes *Do the Right Thing,* two statements fill the screen. They read in part: "Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates a bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers" (King). "I am not against using violence in self-defense. I don't even call it violence when it's self-defense. I call it intelligence" (Malcolm X).
2. In this context, an interesting generational face-off occurred on the political talk show *Inside Washington* between Carl Rowan and Juan Williams in the wake of the release of Lee's *Malcolm X.* Rowan, an old-line civil rights leader who had little use for Malcolm in the 1960s or since, testily noted that Malcolm was missing in action during the crucial fights of the civil rights era. The younger reporter Williams accused Rowan of giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Rowan replied he was fighting for civil rights when Williams was in diapers; Williams retorted that Rowan just didn't understand what Malcolm meant to young black Americans.
3. The collaborative relationship between Malcolm X and Alex Haley is discussed in Wideman. For the story of the original manuscript, see "Text," and "Alex Haley."
4. Although the imagery of *Walk in My Shoes* may evoke "the gangster motif," Michael Curtin argues that "even a white viewer could begin to glimpse the validity of Malcolm's analysis" (169–70).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

5. Of the shocking and "virulent anti-white movement," *Variety* observed that "this quarter, probably like so many others, never before was aware of" the Black Muslims ("Tele Follow-Up"). Among other attentive televiewers were agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who filed extensive reports on the show back to headquarters (see Carson 149, 159–70).

6. Another stage in the moving image afterlife of Malcolm X includes the documentaries released on home video in the wake of Lee's *Malcolm X,* including *Malcolm X: Make It Plain* (1993), *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* (1993), and *Brother Malcolm: The Assassination of Malcolm X* (1994).

7. *Malcolm X* Press Kit, Warner Bros, 1992. In 1966, Worth had acquired the motion picture rights to the *Autobiography* from Betty Shabazz. Arnold Perl, a seasoned Hollywood screenwriter whose varied career included adaptations of Yiddish theater, and whose political activism had gotten him blacklisted during the McCarthy era, wrote the screenplay. Ironically, he never lived to see Malcolm X produced in either documentary or biopic form. He died in 1971 while the documentary *Malcolm X* was still in production. He received a posthumous screenplay credit with Spike Lee on the biopic *Malcolm X.*

8. Michael Eric Dyson discusses this process in *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X.*

9. George F. Custen undertakes a complete survey of the genre in *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.*

10. Not until the late 1960s did Hollywood seriously begin to court African Americans, a segment of the moviegoing audience that attends films out of all proportion to its numbers. A 1967 banner headline in *Variety* trumpeted the news "One Third Film Public: Negro," and reported that "film companies are gradually learning that black power can mean green power. Although Negroes constitute only 15% of the U.S. population, recent surveys indicate they represent nearly 30% of total patronage in major city first run houses" (Beaupre). Perhaps not coincidentally, the next week a small item in the trade paper noted a forthcoming production on the life of the man described as the "former New York Black Muslim chief." This first step in a tortuous path to production was a project being developed at Twentieth Century Fox, based on an original screenplay by Louis E. Lomax from his book *When the Word Is Given* ("Lomax").

11. Oddly, although actor Coley Wallace gets full screen credit in the opening credits ("Introducing Coley Wallace"), his name is absent from the screen credits in the end credit reprise.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## WORKS CITED


"Alex Haley Literary Work Is Auctioned for $100,000." *New York Times,* Oct. 2, 199 A12.

Beaupre, Lee. "One Third Film Public: Negro." *Variety,* Nov. 25, 1967: 3, 61.

Canby, Vincent. "'*Malcolm X*' as Complex as Its Subject." *New York Times,* Nov. 1 1992: C19.

Carson, Clayborne. *Malcolm X: The FBI File.* Ed. David Gallen. Intro. Spike Lee. Ne York: Carroll and Graf, 1991.

Cawelti, John G. *Apostles of the Self-Made Man.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1965.

Curtin, Michael. *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politic* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995.

Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick Rutgers UP, 1992.

*Do the Right Thing.* Dir. Spike Lee. Prod. Spike Lee. Screenplay Spike Lee. Univers Pictures, and 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1989.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X.* New Yor Oxford UP, 1995.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. "Malcolm, the Aardvark, and Me." *New York Times,* Feb. 21 1993: VII: 11.

Lee, Spike, with Ralph Wiley. *By Any Means Necessary: The Trials and Tribulations Making Malcolm X.* London: Vintage, 1993.

"Lomax 'Insiding' on X Biopic." *Variety,* Dec. 6, 1967: 5.

Malcolm X, with the assistance of Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* New Yor Grove, 1965.

*Malcolm X.* Dir. Spike Lee. Prod. Marvin Worth and Spike Lee. Screenplay Arnold Pe and Spike Lee. Warner Brothers, and 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1993.

"*Malcolm X.*" *Variety,* May 24, 1972: 19.

Perry, Bruce. *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America.* Barrytown, NY Station Hill, 1991.

Steele, Shelby. "Malcolm Little." *New Republic,* Dec. 21, 1992: 27–31.

"Tele Follow-Up Comment: Mike Wallace's *Newsbeat.*" *Variety,* July 15, 1959: 47.

"Text Malcolm X Edited Found in Writer's Estate." *New York Times,* Sept. 11, 199 C25.

Weinraub, Bernard. "Hollywood Totals Up a Holiday Season of Mixed Blessings." *Ne York Times,* Jan. 4, 1993: C11.

Wideman, John Edgar. "The Art of Autobiography." *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image.* Ed Joe Wood. New York: St. Martin's, 1992. 101–116.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# "HERR DIREKTOR": BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *SCHINDLER'S LIST*

CLIFFORD J. MARKS AND ROBERT TORRY

*"I aspire to be Oskar Schindler."*
—Steven Spielberg (McBride 429)

*Schindler's List* (1993), Steven Spielberg's first attempt to narrate a topic as historically unwieldy as the Holocaust, tells the now famous story of a German entrepreneur, Oskar Schindler, who through a series of events transforms himself from a practical capitalist into a savior. In the film, Schindler trades in his wealth to protect his Jewish workers from the gas chambers at Auschwitz, in the end bankrupting himself and his business. Often construed as the most significant cinematic statement on the Holocaust,[1] *Schindler's List* has already made the leap from popular culture to historical and educational material. A major television network has broadcast the film with little or no commercial interruption, and it is often shown in high schools to teach students about the Holocaust. Receiving an Oscar for the Best Film of 1993, *Schindler's List* was a remarkable commercial and aesthetic success. Most mainstream critics lauded Spielberg's storytelling abilities, and his Hollywood brethren held up the film as an unparalleled achievement.[2] Though a few writers, journals, and newspapers checked in with some critical commentary,[3] none of it has relegated the film to anything less than its epic rank in American culture.

But why a German hero, and a Nazi one at that? This essay explores the role of biography and autobiography in *Schindler's List.* By autobiography, we mean how the film not only tells the story of Oskar Schindler, but in a metaphoric way tells the story of Steven Spielberg as well.[4] Though the level of Spielberg's accomplishment is significant in terms of bringing the issue of the Holocaust to public attention, the movie—particularly in its biographical elements—says quite a bit about how the director envisions his


CC-0. IIPS Public Domain Research Center Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

role and contributions to art and culture. In our discussion, we mean to distinguish history from biography (and autobiography). History attempts to tell the objective story of past times. Biography tells the story of a person's life in relation to the times in which he or she lives. And autobiography of course tells the same story through the subject's eyes. In our view, Spielberg unconsciously invokes autobiography to write biography and history. This invocation is the palimpsest over which *Schindler's List* was produced.

First we offer some caveats. Spielberg does not see himself as a reconstructed Nazi industrialist. He publicly identifies with the Jewish victims and many of his charitable efforts since the film have been devoted to Holocaust survivors and their relatives. Nor did he raise his arms in triumph and declare that he was "the king of the world" when he received Oscars for best director and picture. The Holocaust is a subject sacred to many, and Spielberg attempted to respect that sacredness. Despite some pointed criticism that he did not, in the process he accomplished something that many thought was impossible to achieve: he brought to popular culture a feature-length film that did not shy away from Nazi genocide. While making the film Spielberg noted, "I'm making *Schindler's List* because I have the ability to make it. Most everybody else wouldn't have been allowed to make it because it's just not commercial." And yet, at the same time he affirmed that "no matter how this movie turns out," more than any other film he had made, *Schindler's List* "reflects who I really am" (Salamon 194). To achieve his goals, Spielberg relies on the subject he knows best—himself—portraying Oskar Schindler, and more subtly, Itzhak Stern, in ways which, at least for us, strongly parallel the life and career of the director.

It is important to distinguish among the three dominant representations of Schindler: the historical Schindler, the figure Thomas Keneally portrays in his book, and the version Steven Spielberg creates in his film. All three confirm that Oskar Schindler was an unsuccessful German businessman living in Czechoslovakia before World War II. His father, a middle-class shop owner, had a tense relationship with his son, who seemed more intent on pursuing women and frivolity than on concentrating on building his own company.[5] The very act of reducing a life to a three hour movie or four hundred page novel emphasizes certain aspects of character at the expense of others. The historical Schindler is often a mysterious figure, whose motives and feelings, while clear at times, are unclear at others, and sometimes conflict. Though emphasizing the ambiguity of motive, both the movie and the book employ narrative trajectories that create a modern hero, who when confronted with impossible circumstances, surmounts the pressures of the time and his own personality to accomplish great moral

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

deeds. Keneally's fictionalized account uses history and memory as a background to recreate an unlikely story about a powerful German helping Jews during World War II. The novel's larger canvas allows for a richer depiction of the Jewish characters, a more complicated understanding of Schindler's motives, and a clearer delineation of the historical events and characters who contributed to the creation of the story. As Keneally says in his introduction, however, the novel's focus is on a "good German." Spielberg overtly chooses Schindler to tell a Holocaust story, but unconsciously tells his own story as well. Schindler's motivation seems even murkier in the film than in the novel largely because Spielberg simultaneously universalizes and personalizes the protagonist.

In both novel and film, though, popular culture has reformulated the historical Schindler, making it important to set forth Schindler's actual achievements before exploring how the film portrays them. To begin with, Schindler did take advantage of the German defeat of Poland, his Nazi Party membership, and his rhetorical skills to build a successful business using Jewish slave labor, in the process amassing a significant fortune. He saved over a thousand Jews from extermination by persuading Nazi officials, through bribery, to allow him to move his workers and others to Brinnlitz, Czechoslovakia, to start up a munitions factory. There he depleted most of his remaining funds caring for his workers and producing unusable armaments. An unsuccessful businessman before the war, once World War II ended, Schindler returned to that status, bouncing from country to country, often relying on the "Schindlerjuden" to support him. And finally, it was mostly through the persistence of Poldek Pffefferberg that Schindler's compelling, if not unique, story came to Thomas Keneally, who wrote his historical novel, and then through that novel to Steven Spielberg, who made his historical film.

It is significant that rather than attempting the dramatization of a survivor's narrative, or an overarching fictional treatment like NBC's *Holocaust* (1978), or a vast historical depiction like Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), or an in-depth factual documentary like Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Spielberg chooses to narrate this Holocaust story—which Keneally describes as "the pragmatic triumph of good over evil, a triumph in eminently measurable, statistical, unsubtle terms" (14)—through the medium of fictionalized biography.[6] Although familiar with other cinematic versions of the Holocaust, and even borrowing certain styles of filming and narration, by choosing to make a good German his focal point, Spielberg rejects any previous mass culture vehicle (see Loshitzky, "Holocaust" 104–15). Instead, he enlists the genre of biography in the service of a crucial purpose.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

If a real person—Oskar Schindler in this case—could succeed under such severe conditions, then the potential for good acts resides in everyone. Or as Eley and Grossman point out, "As Spielberg tells it, Schindler's story is a humanist parable of self-recognition, in which this amoral beneficiary of wartime accumulation finds the good in himself" (52).

But to depict Schindler's transformation, Spielberg left out some important facts. Foremost once more is the motivation for Schindler's actions. Although he experiences an apparent conversion at the sight of the little girl in a red coat seeking cover amidst the horrors of the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, Schindler's transformation does not appear to have any other major causes. As a result, he seems to be an amorphous, postmodern everyman who, when confronted with evil, apparently employs the means to stop it simply to see good triumph. But in actuality, Schindler had more pointed reasons for saving the Jews. He grew up with them. He admired them, as those who have studied the historical Schindler have remarked. "I am stuck with, from some of my documentation," writes Herbert Steinhouse, "the anomaly of a man who was long fascinated by Jewishness, by all the fabulous material of the nineteenth century, of the eighteenth, who had nothing but basic respect for Jews, it seemed, even when he agreed with his party on all but its racism" (Fensch, "Journalist" 14).

There is no question that the historical Schindler, and the figure represented by Keneally, also had a concern for his personal advantage. He could, and did, profit off Jewish slave labor, in part because his lack of anti-Semitism allowed him to accept that Jewish workers would build a quality product, and because Jewish management would allow his company to thrive. But this Schindler did not view the Jews solely as a way to maximize his business. He took their needs into account in a compassionate way. In keeping with his everyman narrative, however, Spielberg downplays Schindler's existing sympathy for the Jews. During the scene where Schindler haggles with unnamed Jewish investors and Stern about the Jews investing in the factory, Schindler comes across as a cold and calculating capitalist, with limited compassion for the plight of these people, and a strong determination to profit off the disempowered group's harsh realities. The film Schindler at best knows that while money was of no use to the Jews, he could offer something back for their investment. What Spielberg does not choose to display, however, is Schindler's complete disagreement with the Nazi's racial agenda.

In this instance, biography conflicts with history and autobiography, and cannot tell the story the director wants to tell. Motivation seems to be a main concern of Spielberg's, but he often seems more interested in his

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

own motivation than in Schindler's. The question "Why did you make this film?" has been posed to Spielberg in numerous forms. In an interview, he discusses how he had the project on hold for ten years, and how he tried to persuade other directors—most notably Roman Polanski and Martin Scorcese—to take it on, because he had not gained the requisite maturity to embark on such a movie (McBride 426–27). As Spielberg gained fame and commercial success by making *Jaws* (1975), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and *E.T.* (1982), he became securely enshrined as a Hollywood luminary who could manufacture massive profits from his projects. But the culture received him on two levels: though his artistry in *E.T.* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* could move an audience, through entertainment and imagination, when he chose to direct more "adult" films like *The Color Purple* (1985) or *Empire of the Sun* (1987), the critics, and the audience, usually had mixed reactions.

In the film, Schindler's maturation process parallels Spielberg's. Schindler inaugurates his persona in the initial cabaret sequence by entertaining Nazi officials—a scene the novel only hints at (Keneally 71–72). Having thus developed his relationship with his Nazi colleagues, Schindler builds his business and his profits until, when his wife visits him, he says, "they won't soon forget the name Schindler here," because he has made so much money. The line is of course ironic, because both the audience and the survivors remember Schindler not for his business acumen, but for his success in outwitting the Nazi death machine and saving Jewish workers and victims. The film tells the story of his successful transformation from a Nazi industrialist, profiting from an evil system, into a doer of great deeds, even though his quest to save lives runs the risk of infuriating the Nazi hierarchy. Spielberg's own career is loosely analogous. As Joseph McBride points out, "Like Schindler, Spielberg struggled for years with the conflicting urges of commercial success and social responsibility, self-interest, and the service of humanity" (427). When Spielberg decided to narrate a Holocaust story, he was the premier Hollywood director of "entertaining" movies, a talent that made him one of the most powerful men in his industry. He had not, however, solidified his reputation as a serious filmmaker. By embarking on the Schindler project, Spielberg undertook to transform himself from a director of entertaining, highly profitable movies, to a filmmaker willing to take risks with historically challenging material. Or put another way, Spielberg had evolved to the point where a rethinking of his own notion of what it meant to make a profit could lead him to make a socially conscious film about the Holocaust.[7]

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

But by structuring his film to universalize the act of doing good, Spielberg diminished some of the story's specific Jewish elements. This to has a biographical dimension. Although Spielberg recalled being frequently accosted as a senior in high school because of his Jewishness as one of th formative moments of his adult consciousness,[8] the lack of overt anti Semitism, as he moved from Ohio to New Jersey to Arizona to California seems to have been Spielberg's common experience with racial hatred. I fact, the only significant tension regarding religious issues was, perhaps young Steven's desire to assimilate more fully into the Christian cultur that surrounded him. At the age of seven, much to the chagrin of his family, Spielberg simulated a crucifixion:

> He enlisted his four-year-old sister Ann . . . to stand by the wheel and wait for instructions. Then he approximated Jesus on the cross by pulling a white sheet over his shoulders, spreading his arms, and crossing his legs. He ordered Ann to turn on the motor. She obeyed, flooding Steven with colored light. There it was: the Crucifixion on Crystal Terrace. (Salamon 136)

From all reports, early in his film career Spielberg tended to shy away from identifying with Judaism, going so far as to embrace Christianity's tenets o salvation, redemption, and mercy as major themes in many of his movies including *E.T.* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), where h aptly "completes" the Old Testament-inspired *Raiders of the Lost Ark* b sending Indy on a search for the Holy Grail.[9] Childhood fantasies of identifying with the majority culture thus became enmeshed with his adult successes as a director.

In some ways, *Schindler's List* traces out Spielberg's own anxieties about his minority culture status and his struggles to overcome them. As we have seen, unlike the historical Schindler, who valued his Jewish friendships, th industrialist begins the film seemingly oblivious to the humanity of his workers. His only concern is an increased profit margin. Although we witness his altruistic acts increase as the plot develops—complaining about th S.S. murdering a one-armed worker, hosing down the cattle cars stuffed full of Jewish prisoners before they go to Auschwitz, saving and safely employing over one thousand Jews by the war's end—we get no glimpse into his ideas about race, or into his reasons, beyond a benevolent form of humanism for doing any of this in the first place. Spielberg's career follows a similar path. From early in his youth up through his young adult success, Spielberg had one passion: to make popular, entertaining, and imaginative films that appealed to a large cross-section of the American public. Culminating in *Jaws,* his early achievements as a director created for him a reputation not

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

as a sophisticated auteur, but as someone who knew how to entertain a mass audience. For this reason, when he first came upon Keneally's book in 1983, Spielberg could not even conceive of making the film. His economic success was unparalleled; he was, in fact, an industry unto himself. He was not ready to risk sacrificing his position at the top of the pantheon of popular culture by making a movie about the Holocaust—to become an entrepreneur who shifted his focus from hoarding his profits to spending them in the cause of liberating human beings. Spielberg, in short, did not yet envision Schindler's life as potentially paralleling his own

It was ten years later when a more financially and emotionally secure Spielberg told the Holocaust story that he had long been contemplating. Like Schindler, he was ready to risk his accumulated capital on a project that differed in degree and in kind from what he had previously attempted. And yet, though Spielberg recognized in Schindler the kind of person he thought he could be, he still could not get a clear fix on Oskar's character. His method for resolving this difficulty is autobiographically significant. He prepared Liam Neeson for the role by showing him home movies of Steve Ross, the late chairman of MCA. It was Ross who had taught Spielberg to share his wealth. Before meeting Ross, Spielberg had saved most of his money; afterwards he became much more philanthropic, getting involved in charities and political causes. Spielberg had modeled himself after Ross, and he wanted the actor playing Schindler to have a similar model. In fact, Spielberg had "always" told Ross that "if he was fifteen years younger, I'd cast him as Schindler" (McBride 429).

For Spielberg, Schindler—a bon vivant, non-practicing Catholic—recalls Ross—a bon vivant, non-practicing Jew. The "non-practicing" aspect is highly significant, because it suggests that universal humanity or goodness are not dependent on racial or religious designations. Spielberg can thus affirm Schindler's and his own *universal* humanity. Neither race nor religion can explain why Schindler emerges as someone who does not fail the Milgram experiment: given the choice to inflict pain or save a life, Schindler chooses the latter. Though acculturated to collaborate in his government's attempt to expand through war and conquest, and concerned with his own financial profit, Schindler still follows a natural path of goodness that historically eluded most Germans before and during the war. "I am convinced that there was a really good man in him," Spielberg claimed, "a man who discovers his goodness through a totally selfless display of humanitarian salvation" (Pascal 32). Taught to Spielberg by his mentor Ross, and unmistakably present in the film's hero, this humanitarianism transcends boundaries of race and religion—a universal goodness that culture and ideology only mask.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

That race becomes less of a factor in Schindler's motivations sugges something about how race had affected Spielberg's own actions. Thoug we can, for instance, dismiss the presence of Christian themes in his earl er films by suggesting that through them the director is responding to th needs of the dominant culture, Spielberg's universalizing vision had als granted all willing participants the opportunity to check their ethnic iden tities at the door of the theater, as they enter into an economic world tha has ample opportunity for everybody. It must of course be acknowledge that Spielberg's downplaying his race and ethnicity in his earlier work, an in the character of Oskar Schindler, is not simply an investment strateg Undeniably, Spielberg is foregrounding a plot in which the discovery of evi and the responsibility to combat that evil become components of a neces sary quest in the evolution of a man's life. Further, Schindler's amorphou transformation stresses how events that take people from their comfortable secure places and put them in the face of danger are often the motivating force for righteous and even heroic acts.

What is truly remarkable, however, is that in the making of *Schindler's List,* as in the film itself, the result of this strategy is the character's, and the director's, eventual assumption of the role of ethnic conscience. In the film subtle hints about the atrocity of racism and the need to overcome cultur al expectations become fully realized with the shift in Schindler's percep tions, which occurs only after the ghetto is liquidated, and his empty fac tory confronts him with the real struggle he must now face. The results ar dramatic, as Schindler's ensuing actions transform him from profiteering industrialist to Germany's minority Holocaust conscience. In Spielberg's case as well, it is the transformation of the hero *and* the suffering of th victims that transform America's most successful director into America's Holocaust conscience. As we have suggested, Spielberg's slight rebellion against his Jewish heritage was accompanied by film after film that gener ated huge profits. Made after many years of evading his own minority cul ture background, *Schindler's List* provided Spielberg with the opportunity to shift dramatically his reputation in public and intellectual circles. In a interview granted around the time of the film's release, Spielberg remarke that "*Schindler's List* is as close to my own life as anything since *E.T.* (Salamon 139), and certainly the film's release and publicity had written large for the first time Spielberg's Jewishness, making *Schindler's List* con ceivably an act of expiation.

Another cinematic parallel between Spielberg and Schindler is perhap the most obvious one—that of director. Schindler's initial scenes—moments that find little elaboration in Keneally's novel—underscor Spielberg's strategy of self-representation through his title character. Thes sequences present Schindler as an artist, engrossed in the creation an

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

presentation of a carefully devised spectacle. In the first scene, we watch as Schindler, his face significantly hidden in shadow, prepares himself for his appearance in a nightclub frequented by high-ranking Nazis. As he selects the appropriate suit, tie, and cufflinks to create the planned effect, Schindler carries out an act of self-creation—the construction of a persona suited to his purpose of winning the friendship and confidence of the Nazis, from whom he hopes to secure his business contracts. That this shadow and camera placement obscure Schindler's face until, in a subsequent sequence, he actually enters the night club and is shown to his table only emphasizes the point. Deferring our introduction to Schindler's face until he has located himself within his meticulously planned performance scene allows the audience to witness the stages of artistic self-fashioning, which lead to the face as the sign of an achieved, purposeful identity.

Having organized his identity to fulfill his entrepreneurial hopes, he proceeds to organize the night club into a stage set in which he is the primary actor. Before long, he has gathered every German officer in the club to his table, selected the appropriate food, wine, and dining companions from the club's show girls, and is leading the group in song. That his creative effort has created for him instant celebrity is confirmed by the response of the maitre d' when a newly arrived officer asks the name of the party's host: "Why, that's Oskar Schindler!" the maitre d' replies, suggesting that within minutes, Schindler has become a "well known" local bon vivant.

Schindler (Liam Neeson) as Director (© 1993 Universal City Studios Inc. and Amblin Entertainment, Inc., Photo by David James). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

That Schindler's achievement of celebrity is also an artistic success is underscored through a series of photographs which, though his guests jostle to appear in the frame, are clearly being composed by the host. In this way, Spielberg introduces Schindler to us as, above all, an imagemaker. When Schindler, with no money of his own, convinces the embattled Jews of Krakow to "invest" their capital in his plan to acquire Deutsche Emailwaren Fabrik (DEF), he justifies his own role as director of DEF to Stern in promotional terms: "That's what I'm good at," he explains, "presentation," as his arms spread wide to encompass the entire movie screen. Schindler will provide the necessary glitz and slickness to give a superficial impression to the outside world, and most significantly to his Nazi contacts, who would have the ultimate say in his ability to do business. Controlling the company from a seat overlooking the set, Herr Direktor Schindler mediates between the outer world and Stern and the other Jews, those actually running the company soundly and producing its significant profit.

Similarly, it was Spielberg's success as an imagemaker that accounted for the wunderkind's transformation from an obscure Ohio kid into one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Hollywood. In making *Schindler's List,* Spielberg felt a responsibility to be true to history, and true to his employees. To make the film, he transported hundreds of actors and technicians to Poland, and provided for their livelihoods. Because he considered the making of the movie to be a personal quest, unlike Schindler, Spielberg invested much of his own money in the project. Like Schindler, however, though with a much greater reserve of cash, Spielberg gave away his profits from the film to help survivors and the preservation of their memories. But most importantly, Spielberg's awareness of both business and aesthetic demands made him realize that a Holocaust film whose only audience is Jews and survivors could not possibly accomplish his didactic goals. Also like Schindler, then, though Spielberg risked his well-deserved reputation as a master showman to "do the right thing" instead of the profitable thing, he also realized that success required him to produce a product that contained enough value to draw a mass audience.

This was a daunting challenge. Though there certainly had been effective treatments of the Holocaust on film and video, no feature-length film had directly used the Holocaust as the complete background. Often criticized for using black and white to depict the Holocaust past, while the American present was shown in color, *Sophie's Choice* (1982) treated the Holocaust as a past significant historical event that continued to traumatize the various characters in the present. Spielberg not only made that event his subject, but filmed the entire story in black and white—a stunning disconnect from his cinematic past of exploding colors and stories.[10] Or to put it succinctly, *Schindler's List* followed on the heels of *Jurassic Park.*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Spielberg's use of the hand-held camera, the use of intimate cinematic methods, the chiaroscuro, and the attempt at a documentary style of filmmaking paradoxically proclaimed that the film would be not only different, but an attempt to expand its director's reputation. Abandoning many of the techniques that had made Spielberg a successful director, in making *Schindler's List* he studied many cinematic documentaries—most notably Lanzmann's *Shoah*—and tried to appropriate their style.[11] These techniques appear in arguably the most powerful sequence in *Schindler's List,* where Schindler and one of his mistresses view the bloody search through the Krakow Ghetto.[12] Watching from a hill above the town, Schindler is increasingly revolted by the demonic violence of the scene below. As the SS slaughters Jews attempting to escape forced evacuation, a young girl wanders from scene to terrifying scene of brutality and murder. Spielberg's inspired decision to insert into the black and white of the film a single red patch of color—the child's coat—does more than provide us with a powerful image of innocence amidst horror. It also confronts us with the cinematic expertise of the director conveying to us the totality of the scene's horror. Terror and technique merge through Spielberg's presentation—an image of cinema's potentially transformative power.

More than any other moment in the film, this scene points to the supposed source of Schindler's ultimate decision to sacrifice all he has gained to save the lives of his Jews. Observing from his privileged position as the horror spreads out before him, Schindler obviously occupies a role similar to that of the film spectator. As a result, his response to the scene is presumed to be shared by the audience, whose look he represents. As Spielberg's shot/reverse shot pattern shuttles between the scene's violence and Schindler's increasing shock, the audience's own disgust is invoked through the cinematic representation of the historical outrage. Perhaps even more subtly, Schindler's status as Direktor renders his own shocked reaction highly ironic. As Direktor of a firm manufacturing war material, a position achieved through the exploitation of Nazi racist policy and through his cultivation of Nazi officials, he is himself a contributor to the agony he witnesses. A similar irony pervades *Schindler's List* itself. Just as Schindler as Direktor oversees the production of military goods, so does Spielberg oversee the production of the film, forcing him to acknowledge the responsibilities of his own vocation and the potential for good or evil his own immense success in the manipulation of this century's most powerful medium grants him.

In the film itself, he explores this potential for institutional evil through the figure of Amon Goeth, the organizer of the Krakow massacre, commandant of the labor camp, and foil to Schindler.[13] As the force governing

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the Plaszow labor camp, Goeth quite literally is the director of a construc-
ed reality. His word is law; his decisions utterly shape the experience o
those imprisoned. Indeed, when Goeth observes the camp from his hillto
villa, Spielberg forcefully reminds the viewer of Schindler's position over
looking the atrocities performed in the Krakow ghetto. Goeth's use of a
rifle equipped with a telescopic sight only intensifies Spielberg's meditation
upon the power of the cinematic apparatus. Goeth's "sight" is murderous
He intensifies his power of vision as a result of his sadistic desire utterly to
master reality. Then from his godlike site, he murders random victims.

Goeth uses apparatus—and not merely the rifle, but the entire camp
organization—to direct and exploit human labor in the cause of producing
a spectacle for sadistic enjoyment. Almost inevitably this exercise of power
can be read as Spielberg's own metacommentary on cinema as apparatus and
industry. Goeth's predatory gaze leads to a spectacle of fetishized violence
similar to that found at the heart of so many contemporary Hollywood
films. Schindler's own dismay as he witnesses the Krakow massacre can
therefore be read as a complex representation of both the guilt resulting
from an insufficiently reflective participation in a system productive of such
terrible results, and a revelation of the potentially redemptive powers of a
cinema that can represent humanity's horrors while remaining dedicated to
humane and politically responsible purposes. Like those of Spielberg's
recent *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), the horrors of *Schindler's List* thus serve
to chasten an industry and an audience devoted to the murderous *jouissance*
of Hollywood violence. As for Spielberg himself, if like Schindler he has
used his own talents and organized the labor of others in the production of
a commodity that has made him a wealthy and powerful man, his decision
to donate all of the film's profits to charity represents an alternative to the
typical products and procedures of the Hollywood film industry that par-
allels Oskar Schindler's own exercise of institutional authority.

Schindler and Spielberg, then, are present as directors in many different
ways. We now turn to how Schindler differs from Spielberg, for although
such differences may seem to mark a turn away from autobiography, ulti-
mately they funnel the viewer back to an appreciation of Schindler that
extends to the film, and finally to its director. To begin with, Schindler and
Spielberg do not share the same economic status when they begin their
"life-saving" projects. Schindler builds his fortunes on the backs of trapped
Jewish investors, slave labor, and insightful businessmen who allow him to
cultivate relationships with the S.S. hierarchy. One further important dis-
tinction: Schindler treats his wife with disdain, pursuing numerous affairs
while building his business. Although Spielberg's first marriage ended in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

divorce amidst rumors of extramarital liaisons, Spielberg claimed that he would have suffered immeasurably without his wife, Kate Capshaw, and family present during the filming of the movie. Perhaps more importantly, it would be highly inappropriate and unfair to associate the distribution of wealth and power by the Hollywood elite with the distribution of death and suffering by the Nazis. In fact, it was a Jewish Hollywood executive, Universal's Sidney Sheinberg, who immediately thought of Spielberg for *Schindler's List* after having read Keneally's book. Finally, at the end of the film, Schindler escapes, disguised as a prisoner, to evade the incoming Soviet army. Spielberg, however, not only energetically promoted the film, which included visits to Germany and Israel, but also welcomed the public scrutiny he provoked through his seeming artistic audacity.

And yet, certain traces of a pattern even in these differences reinforce our larger argument. Although Spielberg used a great deal of his own money to make *Schindler's List,* he still exploited the Hollywood apparatus to support and augment the film's production. In fact, his ability to manipulate the power moguls in Hollywood for years allowed him virtually free reign when it came to choosing his projects. Furthermore, Spielberg's own reluctance to take on *Schindler's List,* and his many attempts to give the project to other directors, recalls Schindler's initial reluctance to see himself as providing a haven for innocent victims. Had Spielberg succeeded in getting Roman Polanski or Martin Scorcese to direct the project, he would have freed himself to continue making movies in the style most suited to his unique position in Hollywood. Spielberg thus attempted his escape much earlier, but finally relegated himself to seeing the film through.

Whether early or late, then, escape is a major theme in the movie. At the beginning, the Jews try to escape their fate, while Schindler tries to cultivate his. Little do they know how inextricably their fates would be linked. As Schindler evolves from cold-hearted capitalist into the savvy manipulator of the system for the benefit of his workers, he exhibits certain behaviors that win admiration from those around him—even the S.S. leaders. The historical Schindler was widely known to treat his Jewish workers with favor and dignity, conditions virtually unknown in the vast number of companies that employed slave labor to make their products. To these capitalists Schindler seemed somewhat of an eccentric dandy, whose charms and bribes outweighed his fatal flaw of seeing his workers as human beings. In the movie, Oskar plays a highly dangerous game of chance with Goeth, who embodies Nazism in a single character. As Schindler gains more confidence in the morality of his position, he scrupulously sees to the improvement of conditions for those working for him, to the point of using

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

his profits to buy their safety in a new factory in Czechoslovakia. Once in Brinnlitz, his hometown, he could fully assert his authority, and control the S.S. in ways he never dreamed possible in Plaszow. He has escaped from the oppressive system by turning it in on itself, and he develops a life that leads to safety for the workers.

Differing slightly from both the novel and historical fact, this trajectory links biography to autobiography, for Spielberg must alter certain biographical elements to deliver this version of the truth. Keneally's novel painstakingly details how Schindler manipulated a deeply corrupt structure. Many Nazi officials found themselves in need of his bribes. The crumbling Nazi system had exhausted itself by 1945; in fact, Goeth was under investigation by the S.S. for overt corrupt actions (Keneally 359). Further, Michael Wildt calls into question a number of Schindler's greatest achievements. He did not buy Jewish slave labor from Goeth. Neither he nor Stern wrote out the famous list. And he did not travel to Auschwitz to save the women (245–46). But through actions like these, the godlike film Schindler controls most of the action in front of him. The truth, which resides closest to Spielberg's heart, has to do with redemption and the possibility of good in the face of extraordinary evil. That is one reason he elevates Schindler to such an exalted status; it is, however, also the reason why the shift seems so sudden. By learning the value of one life, Schindler apparently learns to

Schindler welcomes his workers to the new factory at Brinnlitz (© 1993 Universal City Studios Inc. and Amblin Entertainment, Inc. Photo by David James). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

detest the callous taking of lives. The bodies burned at Plaszow are all individuals, and most notably the body of the little girl, still in the red coat, who caught Schindler's eye during the liquidation of the ghetto. To clear his conscience and alter his perception of what success must really mean, Schindler must learn how the emotions of loss and sadness must displace the emotions of greed and selfish desire. Though Keneally suggests that from the start he values ethical probity as well as his own profits, Schindler definitely eclipses the need for financial gain by fully acknowledging defenseless victims. Steven Spielberg redefines his own style of achievement in a similar way. Financial domination yields to a kind of intellectual or social need which, despite apparent success, cuts against the kind of guaranteed profits that he had come to expect. For Spielberg, the film had to be about himself, had to be close to his heart and self-vision, to give it any lasting resonance or feeling. Spielberg, the ultimate framer of emotions, took perhaps history's most emotional event and contained it within the parameters of a three hour movie. Under these circumstances, success would have to come at the aesthetic, social, and cultural level, or not at all. Had Spielberg's film been universally condemned, his situation would not have been all that different from the "Jew lover" Schindler who was taunted in Germany later in his life (Fensch, "Journalist" 18). Nevertheless, by making this film at this point in his career, Spielberg announced that he would have gladly accepted this designation.

The film's most autobiographical moments occur in some of its most fictional scenes. Three episodes near the end depict Schindler as a generous, daring spirit, whose ability to direct a situation helps those in need. The first occurs when he drives off to Auschwitz to rescue the female prisoners. It seems that a film on the Holocaust must in one form or another confront Auschwitz. Spielberg's treatment here seems odd for many reasons. To begin with, by late 1944, the Germans had begun downsizing the operations there, getting rid of the evidence of their crimes to avoid detection by the oncoming Soviet army. That women and children would be sent to Auschwitz and not immediately executed is perhaps quite plausible, but Schindler's women and children receive "preferential treatment"—most famously when they are ushered into showers, not gas chambers, a scene many critics find too melodramatic, and possibly a source of affirmation for Holocaust deniers.[14] The heightened tension of this scene is in part the result of another confusing detail. The women's and children's momentary safety seems all the more miraculous because of the group of prisoners walking solemnly down into a bunker, where they will be gassed and cremated, ending up as the smoke and ashes seen churning out of the smokestack. The women and children, safe for the moment, avoid their certain destiny.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Schindler's women were in fact mistakenly sent to Auschwitz (a group of men were accidentally diverted to Gross-Rosen, although the viewer never witnesses this). Though he did bargain for their release, apparently Schindler did not go to Auschwitz to save the women, sending his wife and another female envoy instead, along with bribes, to secure the women's liberation.[15] As a result, the most powerful scene in this part of the film, where Schindler grabs the children from the Nazi guards, never happened. How do these changes relate to Spielberg? To begin with, one explanation might be his interest in having Herr Direktor Schindler control the situation. For instance, he risks his status by bribing an Auschwitz official, who complains of the extra paper work needed to secure the release of specific prisoners. More important, though, is Spielberg's fascination, seen in many of his films, with the vulnerability of children and with themes of innocence. From the little girl in the red coat running through the ghetto during the liquidation, to the little boy hiding in the latrine during the selection at Plaszow, to Schindler's rescue of the children from certain death at Auschwitz, the film is rife with examples of threats to children and how adults can help avert those threats. Such concerns familiar to us from *E.T.*, *Hook,* and both *Jurassic Parks*, can explain why the director would want to envision Schindler as a certain kind of protector of childhood. As previously mentioned, Schindler did not personally save the children, although his wealth and privilege provided the resources. By allowing his hero to play this role, Spielberg in a sense creates this role for himself. If we assume that Spielberg sees himself trying to protect children through his movies, then the parallel with Schindler seems powerful here.

The second autobiographically significant fictional episode is Schindler's farewell speech at the Brinnlitz factory.[16] Though the film downplays the danger represented by the S.S. to this factory, historically they represented a real threat. Schindler had to bribe the guards to keep them at bay. Liepold, the commandant, was so severely anti-Semitic that Schindler, through his connections, had to arrange for his transfer to a fighting unit. (The film suggests that the same commandant was there from beginning to end.) Most importantly, Schindler's speech conflates two real addresses he gave—one on his birthday and one at the end of the war—in which he overtly challenged the authority of the S.S. According to Keneally, these speeches severely frightened the prisoners. Spielberg only shows a confused look on Stern's face as he responds to Schindler's words. At any rate, Schindler powerfully plays the role of the director here. Standing in front of a large audience, he controls every effect around him. He tells the guards that he knows of the orders they have received to liquidate the camp—it

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

actuality, the orders were intercepted and never reached them—and he invites them to take the opportunity to fulfill those orders. He chooses this moment to wink at the frightened Stern. Even in the most threatening of circumstances, Herr Direktor knows exactly what will happen. He delivers his material knowing that the salvation of his constituents is only hours away. Like Schindler, Spielberg too is in full control. Knowing that he has taken his audience to cinematic hell and back, he also knows that they are about to be delivered as well. Good is about to triumph amidst cinematic evil, and he has the resources to make this happen.

Resources are the major theme of the third significant scenic departure from history and biography, when Schindler makes his escape five minutes after midnight on the day the Germans surrender. In the film, he receives a gift of a ring with a Talmudic expression on it. Forged form the bridge work of a Jewish worker, this band of gold says that "he who saves one life, saves the world entire." The cinematic Schindler receives this gift and begins to question his own philanthropy/generosity. Pointing to the car, grasping his gold Nazi emblem, a crying Schindler declares he could have done more; he could have saved more lives. Finally, dressed in a prisoner's uniform, he departs with his wife and driver, heading toward the American position.[17] (Quite rightly, he feared being caught by a Soviet unit.) As Keneally points out, Schindler actually left in a car lined with diamonds and other valuables. Even more importantly, no such dramatic scene occurred in front of all the workers. Though a jeweler did make a ring out of a man's bridgework—who had happily allowed a dentist to remove it—only a few workers, Stern among them, presented the ring as a gift, privately and with little fanfare, along with a letter, written in Hebrew and signed by every worker in the camp, testifying to Schindler's heroic deeds. Spielberg freely admitted this scene's fictional quality, but he defended it by saying that for the sake of the film, the audience needed this kind of emotional outpouring to identify fully with Schindler's good acts.[18] Furthermore, the audience had to see these acts in relationship to what others did and could have achieved. Though as Stern himself in the film says to Schindler, "You have done so much," Schindler's outcry confirms the opposite of the Talmudic saying: He who allows one life to vanish, loses the world entire. This sense of failure necessarily extends to the film as well. Functioning as the projection of the director, by admitting his inadequacies to his most fervent supporters Schindler by implication reminds the audience that one film cannot fill the coffers of human need. Despite Spielberg's cinematic mastery, gaps remain in history, and no matter how exalted Schindler's deeds or the film may be, work remains to be done to remove oppression from the world.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Often referring to the atrocities in Bosnia when promoting *Schindler's Li* (McBride 427), Spielberg expressed his hope that the movie might mov people to understand the inherent malevolence of race-based violence.

By donning a prisoner's uniform, Schindler also enacts a kind of trans formation that is almost too ironically appropriate. From that point, th workers for the most part would go on to lead productive and successfu lives. Schindler on the other hand would move from one failed business t another, be taunted as a "Jew-lover" in Germany, and die, imprisoned b his own failure, never having achieved anything remotely close to what h did during World War II. The Jews he saved became his closest family, an he leaned on them for support. Spielberg intensifies this transformation b suggesting that Schindler leaves without any money, possessing only a exhausted emotional savings account—an allegory of sorts for the director' own idea of giving oneself over fully to a project when many doubt the pro ject's validity. Spielberg spoke of the emotional toll the movie forced hi and his family to pay. Filming in Poland, confronting his past, and telling this "personal" story in a place and time far away from his comfortabl roots, Spielberg found he had to recover from this excessive act of doing good. After finishing *Schindler's List,* he took a year off before embarkin on another feature (McBride 442). And yet, he hoped that like Schindler he had now left a healthy and significant legacy, one that would be attache to his name forever.

These departures from "the facts" recall something Art Spiegelman said about *Maus*: "I didn't want any petty factuality to get in the way of th truth." *Maus* of course is overtly autobiographical, which *Schindler's Li* cannot be, partially perhaps because while Spielberg did lose sixteen t twenty relatives to the Holocaust (McBride 22), none of his immediat family experienced the Nazi genocide. In fact, so far in this paper we hav stressed Spielberg's identification with the Nazi party industrialist and th figure's own powers as a director. What then are Spielberg's feelings as a Jew

It is our contention that Spielberg found he could not rightfully iden tify with the victims of the Holocaust. He could empathize, he could meas ure his outrage, but he grew up in a privileged class in a safe society, no even experiencing any glaring anti-Semitism until he was a teenager. An yet, he also grew up as part of the generation that had the responsibility o carrying the story forward, because the survivor generation would continu to disappear during his lifetime. The making of the film is part o Spielberg's process of discovering his Jewish roots, and a newfound spiritu ality that required him to be a mature adult. It is not surprising then tha Spielberg himself felt "more akin to the Ben Kingsley character" (McBrid 429), a composite of a number of individuals who helped Schindler man age his business. This identification is highly significant. Although

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Keneally's novel speaks of Stern as a Jewish scholar, he is not the reverent Jew who utters prayers at any sign of trouble. Rather, Stern takes action as often as he can. He attempts to move Schindler off his moral neutrality by introducing him to the one-armed worker. Sensing a Plaszow prisoner in danger, Stern gets Schindler to bring the worker over to his factory. Carefully generating profits for Schindler's and Goeth's enterprises, Stern shrewdly manipulates the system, and sees that good is accomplished amidst all of the death and destruction. Stern the accountant's Judaism revolves around the doing of good deeds (*mitzvot*); Spielberg's Judaism resonates with this idea.

After the showing of *Schindler's List* caused a minor uproar in an Oakland high school, Spielberg visited the high school to try and allay racial tensions. Having already used 23 million dollars of studio money to make the film, Spielberg helped devise the advertising campaign that saw the film gross more than ten times that amount. When *Schindler's List* opened in Germany and Israel, Spielberg was there to draw attention to these premieres. While we would not suggest that these actions occurred behind the scenes, Spielberg made the most out of his highly empowered position, and of his professional savvy, to further the cause of education and racial understanding. He did not wave a Torah or a prayer book in anybody's face; like Stern, he simply (though profoundly) did what he had to do to ensure the film's success. Financial matters really do seem to have been secondary to Spielberg with this picture. Education, spirituality, and history all surpassed profit as reasons for making this film. Like Stern, Spielberg possessed the talent of making sure his endeavor made a profit; also like Stern, he contributed to the welfare and safety of countless individuals.

We admire *Schindler's List* for its attempt to narrate a story that many find untellable. Steven Spielberg committed himself to a project that would forever take the emphasis off his great talent for entertaining, and shift it to his ability to tell a didactic story. Spielberg himself shifted the economic emphasis of his industry. Apparently, he did not receive one cent of profit from the film, devoting it instead to a number of charitable causes, the most significant of which was an endowment for Yale to collect survivors' stories.[19] In this, he may be said to be following Oskar Schindler's example. Schindler too amassed a fortune, and then used that fortune first to free the workers, and then to set them up in a factory and camp where their lives would generally not be threatened. Spielberg could tell this story because he saw it as a far larger version of his own. By giving Schindler and Stern traits he would like to see in himself, he not only made the story personal, but sought to make the viewer see the story as personal too. In this way, perhaps, historical figure, Hollywood director, and biopic audience can discern the seeming impossibility of goodness within the Holocaust, yet recognize that at times it truly exists.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## NOTES

1. Cinematic treatments include *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1960), *Sophie's Choice* (1983) and NBC's miniseries *Holocaust* (1978), among others.
2. Most major popular film critics offered positive reviews of the film. Terence Rafferty's take exemplifies this response: "Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is a great movie and, like all great works, it feels both impossible and inevitable" (83). For other examples, see the reviews by Roger Ebert, James Verniere, and John Hartl.
3. See for example Louvish, Kurzweil, Gourevitch, Bernstein, and Epstein.
4. For related but less detailed analyses, see McBride 429, Weissberg 184–85, Perry 83, and Ansen 56–57.
5. For in-depth factual information about Oskar Schindler, see Fensch, "Journalist," and Steinhouse 20–35.
6. "I have attempted," Keneally notes, "to avoid all fiction, since fiction would debase the record, and to distinguish between reality and the myths which are likely to attach themselves to a man of Oskar's stature" (10). Nonetheless, Keneally categorizes his novel as fiction. Though he attempts to record only factual events, he must use artificially constructed dialogue to depict those events.
7. Spielberg did not think the movie would make money: "I guaranteed the studio they'd lose all their money" (McBride 416).
8. Spielberg recalled his senior year at high school in Saratoga, California:

   > The mistreatment, he said, "consisted of humiliation . . . being hit, being struck, coughing 'Jew' into their hand[s] as they walked by me in-between classes. . . . I felt as alien as I had ever felt in my life."
   >
   > He said he was "smacked and kicked to the ground during P.E., in the locker room, in the showers. . . . Like most kids, I had been hit from time to time. But I had never been hit in the face. . . . My world collapsed. Although I had wanted to be a gentile out of a desire for conformity, the idea that a person would hit me because I was Jewish was startling to me." (McBride 116)

9. For an analysis of Christian imagery in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, see Torry
10. Claiming that he did not want to "beautify events," Spielberg attempted to achieve a documentary style with his use of black and white photography (McBride 432). Even so, the film is elegantly shot and presented.
11. Spielberg says, "I had seen the films *Shoah* and *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and I also read a lot about the Holocaust, in particular the work of Elie Wiesel" (Pascal 27).
12. Doherty 120–22 and Hanson 86–94 point to this scene as pivotal in the construction of Schindler's character.
13. Manchell 97–99 provides an intriguing Platonic comparison of Schindler and Goeth.
14. Holocaust deniers claim that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz, merely large shower rooms in which prisoners were disinfected. By emphasizing the cleansing showers, Spielberg gives support to these absurd claims; for this scene's inappropriateness, see Horowitz 129 and Wildt 241.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

15. The facts behind this episode are murky. In her memoirs, Emilie Schindler emphatically states that Oskar did not go to Auschwitz, but first sent the head engineer of the factory, Schöneburn, and then a family friend, Hilde, to secure the women's release (66–69). Michael Wildt echoes these assertions (246).
16. Toole calls Spielberg's version of these speeches "pure sap," and provides an alternate interpretation (288).
17. As Wildt notes, "All this pathos in the last part of the film which raises—and distorts—the image of Schindler to something historically superhuman is only offset by the silent, vivid final scene from the present in which the survivors, following a Jewish custom, lay stones on Oskar Schindler's grave in his memory" (246).
18. Manchell explains how the writer and director constructed the final scene's fictionality (99).
19. "The film producer Steven Spielberg is putting all the profits from *Schindler's List,* a movie about the Holocaust, into a new foundation that will make grants to Jewish causes" ("*Schindler's List* Profits" 10).

## WORKS CITED


Ansen, David. "Spielberg's Obsession." Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 56–64.

Bernstein, Michael. "The *Schindler's List* Effect." *The American Scholar* 63.3 (Summer 1994): 429–32.

Doherty, Thomas. "*Schindler's List.*" Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 119–25.

Ebert, Roger. "Spielberg Masters Subtlety in Film." Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 179–81.

Eley, Geoff, and Atina Grossman. "Watching *Schindler's List:* Not the Last Word." *New German Critique* 71 (Summer 1997): 41–62.

Epstein, Jacob. "Rethinking *Schindler's List.*" *Utne Reader* 64 (July/Aug. 1994): 136–38.

Fensch, Thomas. "The Journalist Who Knew Oskar Schindler." Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 3–19.

———, ed. *Oskar Schindler and his List.* Forest Dale, VT: Paul S. Eriksson, 1995.

Gourevitch, Philip. "A Dissent on *Schindler's List.*" *Commentary* 97 (1994): 49–52.

Hanson, Miriam. "*Schindler's List* is Not *Shoah:* Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory." Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust.* 119–39.

Hartl, John. "Spielberg's *List:* A Commanding Holocaust Film." Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 168–70.

Horowitz, Sara. "But Is It Good for the Jews? Spielberg's Schindler and the Aesthetics of Atrocity." Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust.* 119–39.

Keneally, Thomas. *Schindler's List.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

Kurzweil, Edith. "*Schindler's List.*" *Partisan Review* 61.2 (Spring 1994): 201–03.

Loshitzky, Yosefa. "Holocaust Others: Spielberg's *Schindler's List* Versus Lanzmann's *Shoah.*" Loshitsky, *Spielberg's Holocaust.* 104–18.

———, ed. *Spielberg's Holocaust.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Louvish, Simon. "Witness." *Sight and Sound* 4 (1994): 12–15.

Manchell, Frank. "A Reel Witness: Steven Spielberg's Representation of the Holocaust in *Schindler's List.*" *Journal of Modern History* 67.1 (Mar. 1995): 83–100.

McBride, Joseph. *Steven Spielberg: A Biography.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.

Pascal, Michael. "Steven Spielberg: Why I Made *Schindler's List.*" *Queen's Quarterly* 101.1 (Spring 1994): 27–33.

Perry, George. *Steven Spielberg.* New York: Thunder Mouth, 1998.

Rafferty, Terence. "A Man of Transactions." Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 83–89.

Salamon, Julie. "The Long Voyage Home." *Harper's Bazaar,* Feb. 1994: 134–39.

Schindler, Emilie, with Erika Rosenburg. *Where Light and Shadow Meet: A Memoir.* Trans. Dolores M. Koch. New York: Norton, 1996.

Toole, David. "Witness and Voyeurs: The Perils of Remembrance in *Orbit of Darkness* and *Schindler's List.*" *Soundings* 77.3/4 (Fall 1994): 271–93.

Torry, Robert. "Politics and Paranoia in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.*" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 19.3 (1990): 188–96.

Verniere, James. "Holocaust Drama is Spielberg Triumph." Fensch, *Oskar Schindler.* 165–67.

Weissberg, Lilliane. "The Tale of a Good German: Reflections on the German Reception of *Schindler's List.*" Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust.* 171–92.

Wildt, Michael. "The Invented and the Real: Historiographical Notes on *Schindler's List.*" Trans. Pamela Selwyn. *History Workshop Journal* 41 (Spring 1996): 240–49.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# GLOWING DISHES: RADIUM, MARIE CURIE, AND HOLLYWOOD

T. HUGH CRAWFORD

In an episode from the *Andy Griffith Show,* that embodiment of middle American agrarian utopic yearning, Aunt Bee is asked about other careers she might have followed. Looking out toward the horizon, she allows she would have studied chemistry, like that Madame Curie. Andy is startled. After all, Bee is the archetypal American homemaker, and chemistry and physics are fields that seem quite a distance from Meyers Lake, Floyd's Barber Shop, and the Taylors' well-kept home. Bee's dream, however, is not fired by personal experience of laboratory life. Instead, she is thinking of Greer Garson in Mervyn LeRoy's film *Madame Curie.* Though in a sense, this scene is trivial, Aunt Bee's response to the film offers a glimpse into the cultural power of images of science and scientists produced by popular cinema—and in this instance, reflexively perpetuated by television—and at the same time provides some startling insights into the relationship between the cinematic construction of biography, gender, and scientific truth.

In 1943, at the height of American involvement in World War II—and a time when scientists were pressed into service on an unprecedented scale—Mervyn LeRoy enlisted the image of Marie Curie to further the cause of the Allies. Given its historical moment, *Madame Curie* is clearly intended to celebrate scientific progress. Marie not only serves as a model of the scientist's pursuit of truth, she is also the paradigm of the determined, competent woman—a well-educated Rosie the Riveter. Consequently, the film can be regarded as something of a feminist document. Mary Ann Doane has argued that the 1940s were a time of the "woman's film" (22–37), but unlike the victims of heterosexual, monogamous family values this genre usually depicts, Marie succeeds in a world traditionally marked as masculine, and at the end of the film delivers a triumphant hymn to science while standing in what had been the exclusive haunts of male scientists. By taking a woman as his hero, LeRoy not only confronts the traditional


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Hollywood regime of signification, which lacks the resources to depict women as unproblematic active agents, but also gropes with a set of highly gendered tropes traditionally used to describe the idealized value-neutral activity of scientific practice. His choice of hero is not the only part of the film that reveals representational conflicts. The object of the Curies' research produces a similar instability. The radioactivity of radium—its eventual decay—directly parallels the place constructed for Marie as a woman, wife, mother, scientist, and intellectual equal of her male peers. Neither element nor woman fit easily into a chemical or social periodic table.

In *Madame Curie* LeRoy develops themes familiar from such similar films of the period as William Dieterle's *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936) and *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940)—films which depict laboratory life, celebrate the insight of great scientists, teach the general public about science, and dramatize the inexorable march of scientific progress. What is troubling in LeRoy's film is the way he treats his double subject—Marie and radium. While clearly a competent scientist, Marie is also something of a poet. When, for instance, she first sees the effect of pitchblende on a photographic plate, she responds, "it is as if there were a piece of the sun locked up in here." This trait (and others) marks her as feminine. In LeRoy's version, she must look to Pierre for direction, and would not have been able to complete her work without his strong, methodical presence. To a degree, biographical evidence supports this characterization. Pierre was well-known for his ability to design, modify, and manipulate laboratory instrumentation (see Pflaum). Nevertheless, LeRoy clearly exploits such stereotypes to build his traditional love story, even though his strategy subverts his science story.

In *Pasteur* and *Ehrlich,* Dieterle could show microscope slides containing live microbes, but LeRoy cannot directly represent radium. Instead, he shows us Marie, focusing her eyes on the object of her science, and the audience looks at *her.* LeRoy's camera is relentless in its framing, centering, and illuminating Garson's face. Camera angles and lighting merge both discoverer and discovery into a single, luminous object. As a result, the film provides the opportunity to explore the trope of scientific enlightenment—unveiling, penetration, objectification—in relation to Hollywood technique to see how a potentially feminist film is embedded in a patriarchal discourse, and framed by the same objectifying technology/epistemology as its subject—scientific practice.

## ENLIGHTENMENT

Near the end of the film, Professor Perrault attempts to rouse Marie out of the torpor which has resulted from Pierre's death. Perrault notes that she

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

like other scientific heroes—Newton, Galileo—had "caught a star on her fingertips." This metaphor of light and enlightenment provides a link between the epistemology of science and cinema. In his classic study of the emergence of the clinical method in medicine, Michel Foucault quotes and glosses Bichat's Enlightenment ideal:

> Truth, which by right of nature, is made for the eye, is taken from her, but at once surreptitiously revealed by that which tries to evade it. Knowledge *develops* in accordance with a whole interplay of *envelopes.* The hidden element takes on the form and rhythm of the hidden content, which means that, like a veil, it is transparent: the aim of the anatomists "is attained when the opaque envelopes that cover our parts are no more for their practiced eyes than a transparent veil revealing the whole and the relations between the parts." (165–66)

The practice of clinical medicine and more generally of objective science is to unveil the hidden truth of the natural world—make the invisible visible—through patient, practiced protocols. It is an ideal embodied in the very discourse of enlightenment. Truth lurks behind veils that, when sufficiently illumined, can be revealed as transparent—the epistemology of the X-Ray or the Coleridgean symbol. Clearly the cold, objective eye of the camera directly correlates with such unveiling practices, and indeed, from the invention of photography onward, has played a significant role in the production of scientific knowledge. One need only note the use of cine film in such medical technologies as echocardiographic units to recognize that the problematic epistemology of the camera extends well beyond traditional Hollywood narrative.

In *The Birth of the Clinic,* Foucault directs his attention to the role and power of the viewer, developing a concept crucial to both film studies and the social study of science:

> The residence of truth in the dark centre of things is linked, paradoxically, to this sovereign power of the empirical gaze that turns their darkness into light. . . . Rational discourse is based less on the geometry of light than on the insistent, impenetrable density of the object, for prior to all knowledge, the source, the domain, and the boundaries of experience can be found in its dark presence. The gaze is linked to the primary passivity that dedicates it to the endless task of absorbing experience in its entirety, and of mastering it. (xiii–xiv)

The reader of this quotation will immediately note the paradox of passivity embedded within it, which can be disentangled in this way. If one maintains the attitude that scientific truth resides "out there" waiting to be found by an enterprising, diligent, and intelligent scientist, then scientific

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

progress is to a great extent a "primary passivity." However, if scientific facts are inextricably linked to the culturally/technologically constructed frameworks by which they are "revealed," the gaze is anything but passive. Foucault's notion of the gaze is further complicated by the final phrase in the above quotation. The scientific gaze that masters is passive aggressive, not in the clinical sense, but rather in its rhetoric and politics. Both the scientist and the film audience look at an already there entity—film, germ element—but the act of looking, of being in a position within an observational technology, is exclusive and linked to specific forms of power.

Apart from the numerous references to light and enlightenment throughout the film—from the opening "catch a star on your fingertips," to Pierre's mother's description of Marie as "flame-like," to Marie's closing invocation of the "torch of knowledge"—the point that resonates most profoundly in relation to Foucault's discussion is the bedtime story told by Pierre to young Irene in the presence of Marie just after they mistakenly had come to believe their experiment had failed. Pierre relates the tale of a princess who convinced a man that there were great riches contained within a stone. They labor mightily to retrieve the treasure but in the end acknowledge it as an impossible task. In the process they have realized an even greater treasure—each other.

As in much of this film, the rhetoric of this story cuts two ways. It invokes traditional quest narratives, replete with damsels in distress—and at the moment, Marie is clearly distressed—but it also emphasizes their mutual labor. Pierre is not the lone questing knight, but instead is accompanied and assisted by his princess. Perhaps what is more significant in this story is the metaphor of scientific activity it invokes. Science is, as Foucault and LeRoy both in their different ways demonstrate, the careful revealing of the truth hidden deeply within nature, a gradual unveiling of *her* secrets.

Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon as Marie and Pierre in *Madame Curie* (© 1943 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, photo © 1943 Loew's Inc.) Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Feminist theory of science helps draw out these implications.[1] According to Sandra Harding, the radical feminist position

> holds that the epistemologies, metaphysics, ethics, and politics of the dominant forms of science are androcentric and mutually supportive; that despite the deeply ingrained Western cultural belief in science's intrinsic progressiveness, science today serves primarily regressive social tendencies; and that the social structure of science, many of its applications and technologies, its modes of defining research problems and designing experiments, its ways of constructing and conferring meanings are not only sexist but also racist, classist, and culturally coercive. (9)

In one of the landmark early texts in this field, *Reflections on Gender and Science,* Evelyn Fox Keller discusses how Francis Bacon's sexual metaphors characterize the scientist's attitude toward nature. Keller concludes that "the aim of science is not to violate but to master nature by following the dictates of the truly natural. That is, it is 'natural' to guide, shape, even hound, conquer and subdue her—only in that way is the true 'nature of things' revealed. . . . Science controls by following the dictates of nature, but these dictates include the requirement, even demand, for domination" (36–37). This is not the lesson taught by the professor in the opening scene of *Madame Curie,* but it is clearly the lesson of the film itself. Nature will yield her secrets to those dogged enough to pursue her to the end.

Nevertheless, the film does expose and question traditional notions of gender in scientific practice. Initially Pierre is reluctant to share his laboratory with a woman, telling his assistant that "women are the natural enemy of science." This sets up the odd love triangle of the woman's film, with science acting as either spouse or surreptitious lover. Pierre's wooing of Marie almost as an object of science directly parallels Keller's interpretation of the gendering of scientific activity, particularly since LeRoy so blatantly connects Marie to the luminous object that she and Pierre pursue. LeRoy's Marie is both active agent in her own right, and the object of the paternal affection of her older professors and the romantic bumbling of Pierre and his laboratory assistant—1940s versions of science nerds. Pierre's first romantic gesture is the gift of an inscribed copy of his recently published monograph. Later, in one of the most touchingly absurd scenes of the film, he proposes to her not in the interests of love, romance, or family, but instead for the higher cause of science, comparing their relationship to a chemical formula: sodium and chlorine are unstable elements which, when combined, form common table salt. In essence, gendered metaphors of scientific practice and the traditional misogyny of laboratory life create conflicting subject positions for cinematic representations of women scientists.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

According to some feminist theory, the epistemology of "masculine" science is the relentless drive to seek out nature, to penetrate her veils in order to isolate the single principle that governs *her* behavior. As Foucault notes, the veil is an important metaphor in this practice. This image has been explored in some detail by Ludmilla Jordanova. Take, for example, her description of the 1899 Louis Barrias statue "Nature Unveiling Herself Before Science": "The figure of the young woman is covered except for her breasts, and she raises both her hands to the veil on her head in order to remove it" (87). In *Sexual Anarchy,* Elaine Showalter imagines a complementary statue, "Science Looking at Nature": "a fully clothed man, whose gaze was bold, direct, and keen, the penetrating gaze of intellectual and sexual mastery" (145). Jordanova's analysis is not just of the objects being revealed/produced but also of the material of the veils and the conditions of their removal:

> There are three aspects to the question of veiling/unveiling. First, we can attend to the veil itself, to its qualities, metaphorical associations, its contrasting uses and meanings. Second, we can focus on what it either conceals or reveals—woman/nature/truth—that is, on what lies behind the veil. Third, we are drawn to consider the very act of looking itself, an act that lies at the heart of our epistemology. All three bear on the relationship between science and gender. (91)[2]

*Madame Curie* is a useful gloss on these issues. The fundamental epistemological question raised in the production of objective proof is the complex relationship between the "thing" represented, the expertise of the audience, and the technology of representation. Film both depends on and destabilizes these categories. It can never reveal the object in all its plenitude. Instead the audience attends to the luminous qualities of the veil (screen), and contends with the fiction that the representation is an object. This destabilization is particularly poignant in *Curie,* given the film's wavering between a sentimental woman's film and the construction of an outright feminist tract; its wavering between the objective presentation of scientific truth—pedagogy and practice—and playful entertainment; and the wavering of the objects of science themselves—Greer Garson's face and the glowing radium.

Mary Ann Doane raises precisely these points in a discussion of contemporary film studies:

> The major breakthrough in feminist film theory has been the displacement of its critical focus from the issue of positive or negative representations or images of women to the question of the very organization of vision and its effects. This has the decided advantage of demonstrating that processes of imaging women and of specifying the gaze in relation to sexual difference, like most forms of sexism, are far more deeply ingrained than one might initially suspect. From this point of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

> view, it can never be enough simply to reverse sexual roles or to produce positive or empowered images of woman. It is the constitution of vision as a process both within the filmic text and spectator which warrants attention. (176–77)

Such attention is due *Madame Curie* because it so clearly demonstrates Doane's point—Marie is a positive representation of a woman, and is also objectified by the cinematic apparatus—and because the film's subject is fraught with the same contradictions. Scientific practice is a constitution of vision as process which has ideological consequences and political ends.

Marie's final speech takes place in a large theater where she voices the platitudes of Enlightenment science, mentioning the "gleam of knowledge," the "small candles" providing the "dim outline" which adds to the "dream of truth." Hers is a science that has "great beauty" which can "cleanse the world of its evils, its ignorance, disease, poverty and heartache." These metaphors are particularly resonant, and at the same time, densely complex given the self-reflexive moment depicted in this scene. Science is being taught in the cinema theater, and this audience is quite literally watching the flickering outlines of its "truth" and "beauty" on the big screen—a technology that is the product of enlightenment science, and in the current grammar of cinema, perpetuates the objectification of the natural and feminine as it serves the mastery of those who possess the gaze.

Marie's final speech (© 1943 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; © 1943 Loew's Inc.). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## AUDIENCE

Aunt Bee's response to Andy's query raises questions about *Madame Curie*'s construction of its audience. Although it was also shown to the troops overseas when first released, this film was produced by an industry which was then directing its films toward women. The question of audience identification is raised in the opening scene. Marie is shown in the audience of a lecture hall, where the professor invites his students to "catch a star" on their fingertips. The rest of the film charts her move out of that position in the crowd to center stage at the French Academy of Science. This device is clearly one of the strongest feminist statements in the film, inviting the audience to identify with Marie's initial position, and then, like her, to challenge the patriarchal exclusion of women from the center of the scientific world.

Yet, from the beginning, LeRoy sets Marie apart. She is the only woman in the lecture hall, and is strangely illuminated. She may be an observer in the scene, but she is also the object of the camera, and is clearly the "star" in this production. In her "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,'" Laura Mulvey addresses directly the problem of gender and audience identification. Discussing a woman character who resists the role determined by patriarchal culture, she notes, "Her oscillation, her inability to achieve stable sexual identity, is echoed by the woman spectator's masculine 'point of view'" (70). Although Mulvey is discussing women in melodramas, a category *Madame Curie* does not easily fit within, these words clearly describe the character of Marie, and at the same time reveal the problematic nature of the film's audience. LeRoy can offer what on the surface seems a celebration of women's equality, and given Marie's almost uncanny ability to leap beyond current scientific paradigms, her potential superiority to her male counterparts.[3] Ultimately, however, the film rests on masculine tropes of scientific activity, and extends (albeit in a somewhat humorous fashion) the misogyny of the laboratory and the objectification of Marie by the cinematic apparatus. The woman spectator's "masculine 'point of view'"—taking pleasure in identification with a male hero—here is not the result of the hero's sex, but rather stems from the gendering of scientific activity.

This opening scene, which doubles the viewing frame—two audiences learning science—also foregrounds the dramatic elements of science. The production of scientific knowledge has traditionally been conceived of as a revealing of nature's secrets through the careful presentation of objective data. This rhetoric is usually tied to the dramatic in that it involves a technology which will enable a competent audience to see and validate such facts.[4] In a discussion of the production of knowledge in seventeenth-century science

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Steven Shapin notes, "The physical and the symbolic siting of experimental work was a way of bounding and disciplining the community of practitioners, it was a way of policing experimental discourse, and it was a way of publicly warranting that the knowledge produced in such places was reliable and authentic" ("House" 373–74). Such an apparatus instructs its audience to identify "proper" details. In his *Social History of Truth,* Shapin goes on to detail the range of social circumstances involved in producing a reliable audience, one that has the ability and social status to perform the proper identifications. While clearly these two theories of audience use the term identification differently—in film theory the concern is with the audience's imaginary identification *with* characters, while science is concerned with identification *of* a specific entity—nevertheless, the actions represented by this single word are complexly related. Both identifications require an audience sufficiently schooled in a regime of signification, and both depend on a technology of objectification, apparatuses that exert power in two directions. The viewer who is the bearer of the look is required to warrant the knowledge being produced, while the technical and social framing of the object restricts that viewer's options for identification (both *with* and *of*).

Bruno Latour discusses the dramatic elements of the production of objectivity. In an analysis of Louis Pasteur which has direct bearing on film theory, he claims that

> Pasteur's genius was in what might be called the *theater of proof.* Having captured the attention of others in the only place where he knew that he was the strongest, Pasteur invented such dramatized experiments that the spectators could see the phenomena he was describing in black and white. Nobody really knew what an epidemic was; to acquire such knowledge required a difficult statistical knowledge and long experience. But the differential death that struck a crowd of chickens in the laboratory was something that could be seen "as in broad daylight." (85)[5]

According to Latour, scientific pedagogy, which cannot easily be disentangled from scientific practice,[6] is inherently dramatic, and requires a suitably educated audience. While *Madame Curie* clearly serves a pedagogical function—the general audience does come away from the film with a relatively clear understanding of the Curie's laboratory practices and the significance of radioactivity, and that same audience is now appropriately steeled for the fight to win World War II—it is more obviously meant to give some pleasure to its audience. Consequently, the film's technology of objectification is rarely turned to the incomprehensible details of laboratory life, but instead to the traditional object of the camera's gaze—a woman's face. LeRoy's theater of proof reveals a single phenomenon in starkly rendered,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

black and white differentials: Greer Garson as objectified femininity stan ing apart from the obscure murk of extraneous contaminants.

This double focus of science as drama and film as male fantasy is enac ed in one of the most dramatic moments of *Madame Curie*. Marie has bee studying pitchblende, and by separating out the elements, has establishe the radioactivity of uranium and thorium. But she cannot account for th remaining four points shown by the electrometer. She asks Pierre to chec her work—absurdly implying she is unable to deal with the technical app ratus, but at the same time demonstrating the importance of collaboratio in laboratory activities and consequently undercutting the popular notio of the isolated great scientist. Pierre follows her technique as she explains i both to him and the audience. Even though this scene does not take pla in an amphitheater, it is framed by the curtains they must open and clos to see the moving light on the apparatus. Marie's most important insig takes place when she unveils the blackboard to check her calculations, a as the music comes up, looks into the light to ask if they dare question th central dogma of current chemistry to account for this phenomenon. A usual, Pierre is depicted in half light—the position of the film's audience as he watches science and scientist become one.

However, this scene is not without contradiction. As usual, Marie brightly illuminated, but she also closes the curtains to view in isolation th moving light of the electrometer. Since E. Ann Kaplan's essay "Is the Ga Male?", considerable attention has been spent discussing the agency involve in the look. Doane argues that when the woman in the film becomes a spe tator, she has some agency (129). Clearly in this scene, Marie is the bearer the look, as she is the one reading the instrument. However, as in numero other scenes, the details of the lab—and Pierre, the quintessential detache observer whose presence is barely observable—recede into the shadows, an the film's audience is invited to read Marie's face while she reads the instr ment. She moves from active observer to the object of observation.

## REALISM

Scientific objectivity—the construction of a techno-social apparat designed to reveal nature to competent witnesses—depends on the rheto of the theater of proof: an emphasis on the untrammeled gaze of the obje tive scientist regarding dispassionately the supposedly non-ideologic material world.[7] In that framework, the material world and attenda notions of realism become increasingly problematic. In her examination the "look," Laura Mulvey raises a correlative in film studies:

> There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

> and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. ("Visual Pleasure" 68)

The cinematic opposite of the concept of narrative film Mulvey describes is documentary, a form more closely aligned with scientific realism.[8] In documentary, the audience's awareness of the cinematic apparatus is maintained. (The mark of nature documentary, for instance, is drops of water on the camera lens.) Mulvey correctly points to narrative film's suppression of such tropes as part of the regime of realism associated with the unobtrusive Hollywood camera—a grammar of signs that produces an effect of truth.

*Madame Curie*'s position as a narrative of a love story, a biopic, and a science film, however, creates the opportunity to extend and in part question Mulvey's assumptions. The homogeneity of the audience and the "pro-filmic event" is questionable ground upon which to build a different regime of realistic signs. Albeit unintentionally, LeRoy's film raises these issues across several registers. First and most obvious is that the ostensible "pro-filmic event" in a science film is the object of nature to be un-veiled. This creates an interesting problem if that object cannot be seen as object. When, after years of toil, Pierre and Marie unveil the final dish and see nothing but a stain, Marie later wonders if it were merely a matter of a "definite amount." They return to the lab that night to see not a "definite amount," but a glowing dish, framed through the windows of their laboratory as they fumble with the locked door. As if to emphasize the aura of the discovery, and his construction of his heroine's own aura, LeRoy brings his camera in tight focus on Marie's face as it is illuminated by the dish. The "pro-filmic event" being staged here is a strangely unstable representation of an unstable atom, an effect heightened by the (potential) pleasure the audience takes at the glow of Greer Garson's face, and the glow of the theater screen itself.

*Madame Curie*'s glowing dish (© 1943 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, photo © 1943 Loew's Inc.). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Of course, *Madame Curie* is a film that is merely staging scientific observations, but one must bear in mind Latour's argument that scientific demonstrations have the same ontological status as such staging. The film also raises questions about the stability of the category of "traditional narrative," and the audience pleasure in its unfolding. Generally, it coincides with Mulvey's notion of narrative, but at crucial moments, the pleasure of that love story is interrupted by pedagogical scenes which grant the audience sufficient expertise to warrant the accuracy and significance of the Curies' science. William Dieterle's *Story of Louis Pasteur* has been called the first docudrama, and LeRoy's film clearly follows in this hybrid tradition which fluctuates between a love story and a science biography. He carefully outlines the particulars of laboratory etiquette in the humorous jostling between Pierre and his lab assistant as they attempt to make a place for Marie, and then introduces radiation in the most overtly pedagogical scene of the film. Becquerel bursts into the lab to invite Pierre, and then Marie, to see a strange phenomenon he had inadvertently encountered. This scene gives LeRoy the opportunity to teach his audience something of the "scientific method" through Becquerel's definition of a scientific problem, his experimental design and protocols, and his subsequent analysis of his data. Later LeRoy uses voice-over and montage to describe the Curies' separation of radium from pitchblende, and then, borrowing a page from traditional scientific documentary, uses time-lapse cinematography to represent the final separation process. The result of these strategies is an audience sufficiently educated to warrant the scientific significance of the events as they transpire, and at the same time to perpetuate the rhetoric of the vaunted scientific method as the sure route to scientific truth—a point cast in some doubt by the drama of the stain, which seemed a mark of failure until the later glow reveals the accuracy of the Curies' approach and the significance of their discovery.

The cinematic apparatus is further embedded in a practice and rhetoric of scientific objectification emerging in the nineteenth century—photography. A photograph is a significant sign in two of the film's scenes, and an important trope in LeRoy's overall cinematography. LeRoy opens the Becquerel scene with a close-up of a photograph—the first evidence of radiation—and then dollies back to a larger tableau of the scientists considering its implications. Nearly contemporaneous with Becquerel's famous photo was Wilhelm Röntgen's discovery of X-Rays. Like the Curies (and LeRoy) he also grappled with a way to represent his discovery as something to be seen, a point evident in his famous "Preliminary Communication": "I found by accident that the rays also penetrated black paper. I then used wood

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

paper, books, but I still believed I was the victim of deception. Finally I used Photography, and the experiment was successfully culminated" (Glaser 64–65). Röntgen successfully produces an alternative to the traditional theater of proof, which would require both the presence and the trained eyesight of an audience. Instead, he uses an inscription device that has the traits of reproducibility, mobility, and according to the rhetoric, accuracy.

In science, photography and film became methods for rendering the invisible visible. Etienne-Jules Marey became a significant physiologist because he designed a number of apparatuses to inscribe imperceptible motions. François Dagognet describes Marey's method: "No one was as successful at making visible what kept to the shadows. How were these dark areas to be lighted? The forces of life are hidden; by transposing them he brought them fully into the light" (15). In Marey's world, photography is a technology of enlightenment. It is also a method of capture, of transposing forces, and like the Foucauldian gaze, a form of mastery. LeRoy's use of photographs and photographic techniques is therefore tied to many of the same masculine rhetorics as discussed in the feminist critique of science.

In an examination of realism and documentary, Fredric Jameson has argued that

> Photography as such—and even documentary film, which one might have expected to be central to these theories of realism, but whose claims are paradoxically resisted in the name of *fiction* film—both offer occasions for reification and, one would like to say, for ontic misreading, insofar as they are preeminently susceptible to reappropriation by an aesthetic of inert reflection, and tend to omit (or to allow us to ignore and forget) the dual structure of eventfulness constitutive of such photographic realism—the event on the side of the subject as well as that on the side of the object, the happening of the act of registration as well as the instant of history uniquely "registered" upon the bodies of the photographic "subjects." (186–87)

Jameson is clearly discussing notions of literary and cultural realism, but his emphasis on the "dual structure of eventfulness" can be applied to scientific realism as well.[9] Scientific data that relies on a naive "aesthetic of inert reflection"—that is, scientific practice that regards the photograph as a "thing" capable of representing itself in all its plenitude and evoking clear acknowledgment of its truth—risks "ontic misreading." Of course in actual practice, such evidence is usually regarded as problematic and variously interpretable, but the progress of LeRoy's film subverts such healthy suspicion. Becquerel's photograph is seen as a problem to be solved—a thing to be found—but the glowing "photo" of radium, the dish framed by the laboratory windows, simply *is* the truth of the scientific experiment. The

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

patient instructing of the film's audience—the history that is required fo the thing to have meaning, for it to *be* a thing—is suppressed at th moment of glowing presence, a moment also clearly related to the realis of "fiction" film.

LeRoy shows some sensitivity to the "dual structure of eventfulness" o photography in the second scene where a photograph is foregrounded. A the wedding, he reflexively reproduces the bride and groom from an actu al photograph of the biographical Pierre's and Marie's wedding. The tw are poised on bicycles, ready to commence their honeymoon tour of th French countryside. LeRoy's camera captures not just the pose and attitud of those present, but also the photographer's act of registering the scene, o validating its already absent presence. This self-consciousness appears o two other levels in the film. Clearly LeRoy exploits the tropes and attitude of fashion photography through his insistent framing and highlighting o Greer Garson. This is perhaps most evident in the staging of the one scen where she wears evening dress. (Marie Curie was famous for her lack o interest in fashionable dress.) Pierre enters the room to see her standing o a stool modeling the dress. As a result of her position—her head covers picture hung on the mantle though the frame remains visible—she is trans formed into a picture to be hung on the wall.

These points of self-consciousness reveal a fundamental trope o LeRoy's cinematography. Apart from the numerous close-ups of Mari and an occasional shot/reverse shot and an even rarer two-shot, the primar camera work in this film is tableau. LeRoy uses a stationary camera focuse on a scene that generally includes two or three actors occupying a roo replete with appropriate details—usually the laboratory with its dus equipment, tables, and so on. Apart from such occasional documentar strategies as voice-over/montage and time lapse cinematography mentione above, the story develops slowly within these virtually static tableau shot Janet Bergstrom notes that Jacqueline Rose has argued that "there is a com ponent of aggression inherent in the shot/reverse shot structure because its restaging of aspects of the mirror phase" (179).[10] As Mulvey notes, th aggression is tied to the look between "the characters at each other withi the screen illusion." One could add that the tableau, while seemingly mo benign, involves a framing of the characters under the look of the film audience and the director's camera in a fashion not too distant from th surveillance of Foucault's panoptical dystopia (see *Discipline and Punish*).

By using a single camera and reducing the number of sets involved, th static tableau is obviously an inexpensive way to shoot a film—a point o some consequence given the film's era. But given the subject matter, th

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Typical LeRoy tableau (© 1943 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, photo © 1943 Loew's Inc.). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive).

cinematic trope is significant. Like cinema, photography served two separate but related functions in society: as evidence (in this case scientific proof), and as entertainment (fashion plates, etc.) Photography is in some ways an embodiment of the scientific epistemology, for it is an unveiling—it reveals that which cannot be perceived temporally—and a framing. It is a surrogate for that theater of proof which is designed to produce starkly rendered, observable details. It also embodies Foucault's notion of the gaze as a "primary passivity that dedicates it to the endless task of absorbing experience in its entirety, and of mastering it." LeRoy's trope of the tableau directly parallels the unstable position discussed above. It marks science as the patient accumulation of detail, of bringing to the center of the frame that which lies just behind the curtain, and which is now revealed to the insistent, penetrant eye of the camera or the scientist. At the same time, it participates in the objectification of its subject, turning Marie Curie/Greer Garson into yet another fashion plate.

On the other hand, the tableau enables the audience to see both scientist and phenomenon, and therefore to remain aware of the scientist's actions and gestures. This in some ways drains the power from the rhetoric of scientific objectivity, where the scientist does not act but merely watches

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

from the outside—almost hidden, like the man behind the camera. B given the more popular and widely disseminated regime of significatio associated with tableau photography—magazine depictions of the goo life—Marie's position within such sets is not one of individual power o agency, but instead a mark of privilege and passivity.

Aunt Bee's response to the film, which on the surface seems simply matter of individual identification, is deeply embedded in a number technologies of representation and systems of subjection. Living in a wor where Andy is the only character with any power—and his famous reje tion of the gun/phallus simply strengthens this image—Bee aspires to th agency and independence demonstrated by Marie, as depicted in the fil and made popular by Eve Curie's biography. Yet, at the same time, Bee responding to the film's narrative, the sentimental depiction of Marie object of Pierre's affection—Bee is known for her addiction to radio so operas—and to the fetishization/objectification of the film's star. By vie ing the film through another frame, that of recent film theory and the soci study of science, we can recognize the fundamental conflicts embedded i these regimes of signification, and at the same time, the remarkable sym metry of those critiques.

## NOTES

1. See for example Donna Jeanne Haraway's *Primate Visions,* and *Simians, Cyborgs, a Women;* Mary Jacobus's, Evelyn Fox Keller's, and Sally Shuttleworth's *Body Polit* Ruth Bleier's *Feminist Approaches to Science;* and David Noble's *A World Witho Women.*
2. In a different context, Luce Irigaray raises a similar point: "And her eye has becom accustomed to obvious 'truths' that actually hide what she is seeking. It is *the re shadow of her gaze* that must be explored" (193). Doane explores this point in relati to the role of vision and the woman's gaze in film (176–79).
3. It is as if because she is a woman in science, and consequently occupies an unstab position, she can conceptualize the notion of an unstable element. In a similar ve Evelyn Fox Keller has argued in *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work Barbara McClintock* that McClintock's gender and marginal position within the sc entific community was central to her work.
4. For a discussion of this concept, see Crawford, "Imaging the Human Body." For preliminary "history" of objectivity, see Daston and Galison; see also Schaffer.
5. Barbara Stafford's *Body Criticism* raises a related point. She comments on the "fund mental link between geometry and pedagogy, and the exaggerated intellectualizati of images as rarefied schemata in Enlightenment manuals of all sorts. By its virule purity, the absoluteness of its divisions into black and white, the detached and unc tangled diagram performed a mental and optical disinfection" (148).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

6. For an extended discussion of this issue in relation to film studies, see Crawford, "Screening Science."

7. For feminist critiques of scientific objectivity, see Bordo; Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women;* Hubbard; Tuana; and Keller, *Reflections.* For a discussion of alternatives to objectivity as visuality, see Martin, 70–71.

8. This has been a common strategy in feminist film studies, particularly in the turn from the study of narrative objectification to technological objectification (see Penley, "Introduction" 6). For extended discussions of documentary realism, see Allen, and Ohlin.

9. The modern debate in the social studies of science between the realists and constructivists is now decades old. Its high-water mark was the 1989 conference "Realism and Representation" sponsored by the Rutgers Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture. Papers from this conference were later published in Levine. Gross's and Levitt's *Higher Superstition* has revived the discussion but has not carried it in any productive directions.

10. Bergstrom is discussing Rose's "Paranoia and the Film System."

## WORKS CITED


Allen, Jeanne. "Self-Reflexivity in Documentary." *Explorations in Film Theory: Selected Essays from* Ciné-Tracts. Ed. Ron Burnett. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Bergstrom, Janet. "Enunciation and Sexual Difference." Penley, *Feminism.* 159–85.

Bleier, Ruth, ed. *Feminist Approaches to Science.* New York: Pergamon, 1988.

Bordo, Susan. *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture.* Albany: SUNY Press, 1987.

Crawford, T. Hugh. "Imaging the Human Body: Quasi-Objects, Quasi-Texts, and the Theater of Proof." *PMLA* 111.1 (Jan. 1996): 66–79.

———. "Screening Science: Pedagogy and Practice in William Dieterle's Film Biographies of Scientists." *Common Knowledge* 6.2 (Fall 1997): 52–68.

Curie, Eve. *Madam Curie.* Trans. Vincent Sheean. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1938.

Dagognet, François. *Etienne-Jules Marey: A Passion for the Trace.* Trans. Robert Galeta with Jeanine Herman. New York: Zone, 1992.

Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. "The Image of Objectivity." *Representations* 40 (Fall 1992): 81–128.

Dieterle, William, dir. *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet.* Warner Bros., 1940.

———. *The Story of Louis Pasteur.* Warner Bros., 1936.

Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film in the 1940s.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic.* Trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith. New York: Vintage, 1975.

———. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Glaser, Otto. *Dr. W. C. Röntgen.* Springfield, IL: Charles S. Thomas, 1945.

Gross, Paul R., and Norman Levitt. *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarr with Science.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World Modern Science.* New York: Routledge, 1989.

_____. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledg 1991.

Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.

Hubbard, Ruth. "Science, Facts, and Feminism." *Feminism and Science.* Ed. Nan Tuana. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 119–39.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman.* Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell U 1985.

Jacobus, Mary, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds. *Body Politics: Wome Literature, and the Discourse of Science.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Jameson, Fredric. *Signatures of the Visible.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Jordanova, Ludmilla. *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989.

Kaplan, E. Ann. "Is the Gaze Male?" *Women in Film: Both Sides of the Camera.* New Yo Methuen, 1983. 23–35.

Keller, Evelyn Fox. *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClint* New York: Freeman, 1983.

_____. *Reflections on Gender and Science.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.

Latour, Bruno. *Pasteurization of France.* Trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law. Cambrid Harvard UP, 1988.

LeRoy, Mervyn, dir. *Madame Curie.* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943.

Levine, George, ed. *Realism and Representation: Essays on the Problem of Realism in Rela to Science, Literature, and Culture.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993.

Martin, Emily. "Science and Women's Bodies: Forms of Anthropological Knowledg Jacobus et al. 69–82.

Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired Duel in the Sun.*" Penley, *Feminism.* 69–79.

_____. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Penley, *Feminism.* 57–68.

Noble, David. *A World Without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Scie* New York: Knopf, 1992.

Ohlin, Peter. "Film as Word: Questions of Language and Documentary Realism *Explorations in Film Theory: Selected Essays from* Ciné-Tracts. Ed. Ron Burn Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Penley, Constance, ed. *Feminism and Film Theory.* New York: Routledge, 1988.

_____. "Introduction—The Lady Doesn't Vanish: Feminism and Film Theory." Pen *Feminism.* 1–24.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Pflaum, Rosalynd. *Grand Obsession: Marie Curie and Her World.* New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Rose, Jacqueline. "Paranoia and the Film System." Penley, *Feminism.* 141–58.

Schaffer, Simon. "Self-Evidence." *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Winter 1992): 327–62.

Shapin, Steven. "The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England." *Isis* 79 (Sept. 1988): 373–74.

———. *Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle.* New York: Viking, 1990.

Stafford, Barbara. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.

Tuana, Nancy. "The Weaker Seed: The Sexist Bias of Reproductive Theory." *Feminism and Science.* Ed. Nancy Tuana. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 147–71

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# OSCAR WILDE AT THE MOVIES: BRITISH SEXUAL POLITICS AND *THE GREEN CARNATION* (1960)

MARGARET D. STETZ

In her 1990 study *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* Elaine Showalter notes,

> The 1980s and 1990s . . . compulsively tell and retell the stories of the 1880s and 1890s, in contemporary versions of Victorian novels, in film and TV adaptations, in ballets and musicals, and in all the myriad forms of popular culture. . . . Yet in retelling these stories we transmit our own narratives, construct our own case histories, and shape our own futures. (18)

But this phenomenon is in fact nothing new. For the whole of the twentieth century, popular culture in general, and film in particular, has repeatedly turned to the creations of the late-Victorian literary imagination—to Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde, to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, to Bram Stoker's Dracula, to Oscar Wilde's Salome—and embodied these characters in ways that have both reflected and furthered particular social or political agendas of the present day, far more than those of the past. Often, these characters have been appropriated, animated, and reimagined as what Wilde would have called "masks"—personae through which different movements and moments have spoken.

No fictional creation of the British fin de siècle—no character out of any play, novel, or narrative poem of the nineteenth century—has proved so useful or durable a mask as the figure of Oscar Wilde himself. The number of British, American, and Irish novels, poems, plays, performance pieces, TV productions, and films in which Wilde has appeared as a central or peripheral presence is nothing short of astonishing.[1] Anne Varty scarcely exaggerates in describing this as "a kind of industry," dedicated to generating and increasing "Wilde's legendary reputation" (40). But the


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

ultimate aim of this industry has centered less upon the vaunting of the reputation for its own sake and more upon turning that reputation to the support of particular causes dear to the makers of these images. Using the voice of "Gilbert," one of his own innumerable masks, Oscar Wilde had remarked in "The Critic as Artist" that "Yes, the objective form is the most subjective in matter. Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (389). In recent years, Wilde has been used by Terry Eagleton, for instance, in the 1989 play *Saint Oscar,* as a voice crying out not only against the nineteenth-century oppression of the Irish by the English, but by allegorical extension, against the late-twentieth-century British government policies toward Northern Ireland condemned by Eagleton himself (Varty 40). By way of accounting for the range and multiplicity of the political positions for which representations of the life of Oscar Wilde have served as platforms, John Stokes has said, "In the 1890s Wilde was a public figure, in the 1990s he is the public itself" (*Oscar Wilde* 184). Wilde's chief value, nevertheless, has been to those who have wanted to address, whether overtly or covertly, the issues of homophobia, gay rights, and gay pride, for the story of his career—and especially of its end, in a conviction on charges of having committed "acts of gross indecency" with a variety of working-class male prostitutes, and a sentence of two years in prison at hard labor—lends itself well to such purposes.

As we mark the year 2000, the centenary of Wilde's death at the age of forty-six not long after his emergence from prison, we have seen an avalanche of competing representations of Oscar Wilde. Several of these are now familiar to readers, theatre patrons, moviegoers, and video rental audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1998, a production of David Hare's drama about Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, *The Judas Kiss,* moved from London to New York, with the presence of Irish actor Liam Neeson, fresh from his role in *Michael Collins,* meant to remind the audience of Wilde's importance as a symbol of ultimately unassimilable Irishness, even as the male nudity and lovemaking onstage brought issues of same-sex erotics to the fore. Brian Gilbert's 1997 British-made film, *Wilde,* also debuted in the United States in 1998, with Stephen Fry playing what John Stokes has described as a protagonist who serves as "a contemporary role model" to reflect "changing images of the gay man" ("Essence" 20). *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde,* the American playwright Moisés Kaufman's dramatization of the transcripts of the trials, which continues to run off-Broadway and elsewhere, has juxtaposed Wilde's criminal prosecution at the end of the last century with late-twentieth-century American homophobia, and has framed the late-Victorian events with a Queer Studies influenced perspective articulated by

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection. Harivansh

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

a modern academic figure named "Marvin Taylor"—inspired by Marvin Taylor, curator of the Fales Library at New York University. Meanwhile, as founder and artistic director of the Tectonic Theater Project in New York City, Kaufman has also been responsible for producing a float based on *Gross Indecency* that has appeared for several years in the New York Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade, thereby quite literally using a representation of the life of Wilde in the sphere of street-level politics.[2]

Throughout the winter and spring of 1998–1999, the Bravo cable network put into regular rotation a 1997 documentary, directed by Hugh Thomson, from the BBC's "Omnibus" series. Written and presented by Michael Bracewell, this video biography—renamed "Bravo Profiles Oscar Wilde" for the American market—depicts Wilde as "the first pop star" (which makes Lord Alfred Douglas "the ultimate groupie"), crediting Wilde explicitly with being the inventor not only of gay male style and culture in the twentieth century, but of all the attitudes and spectacles of rebellion that came to prominence in the 1960s through masculine rock-star figures and that reached their apex with the punk bands and the glam rock singers of the 1970s and 1980s. Appearing at the end of a long period of Conservative rule, following the consecutive governments of prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major, this British film holds up Wilde defiantly as the antithesis of conformity, sexual or otherwise. The political function of the representation of Wilde becomes clear, as Michael Bracewell addresses the camera and closes with a plea for a liberal humanist notion of individual rights:

> And this is why [Wilde] matters, and why his life and work comprise a classic manifesto for free thought and disaffection. Oscar authorized a way of life for the generations who followed, and perhaps the best executors of his legacy are all of those people who feel that they're somehow different —who don't want any trouble, but would go down fighting for their right to be different. Their right to be different, after all, is everyone's right.

Bracewell's interest in "difference," however, does not extend beyond masculine uses of the Wildean legacy, for the documentary erases all consideration of Wilde's importance to women, lesbian or straight, whether inside or outside the world of rock music.

Soon, visitors to England and residents alike will be faced with a further set of biographical constructions. As of Summer 1999, three different exhibitions devoted to Wilde's life and times have already been announced for the year 2000 in three separate London venues: the Geffrye Museum, the Barbican Arts Centre, and the British Library. The last of these will be

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

co-organized by the author Merlin Holland, Oscar Wilde's grandson, who has made his own contribution to the popular circulation of images of Wilde with *The Wilde Album* (1997), a collection of photographs that take their subject from infancy to the end of his career and constitute a visual biography, presented through the figure of Wilde's aging body and its changing style of dress. That versions of Wilde's story will be ubiquitous in the opening years of the twenty-first century is all but guaranteed.

Less considered today, however, as these new "Wildes" proliferate, is an earlier moment, when there was a similar convergence of "Oscar Wildes" appearing and speaking out simultaneously in stage performances and on the screen. The year 1960 saw the first production at the Gate Theatre in Dublin of *The Importance of Being Oscar,* a very popular one-man play written by and featuring the actor who called himself Micheál Mac Liammóir (born Alfred Willmore). At the same time, however, cinema audiences had the extraordinary opportunity to catch not one, but two different Oscar Wilde "biopics," made by British studios and released seemingly in direct competition with one another.

Why? What was it about the year 1960, as a moment in culture and politics, that made it appealing or even necessary for two sets of filmmakers in England to bring the life of Oscar Wilde to the screen? In what ways did the retelling of his story function as a mask, through which the otherwise unspeakable might be addressed in the popular sphere? What did these film versions of Wilde allow the screenwriters and directors to say about male homosexuality and its place in the social order in their own day? How did biopics, with their conscious and selective refashioning of the past, also perform the role of arguments in favor of legal reform in the present?

* * * * *

In looking at the phenomenon of the Wilde biopics, we must first recall the legal status of male homosexuality in England, which in 1960 remained precisely what it had been at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1885, Parliament had passed the Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendments Act, criminalizing and mandating harsh punishment for sodomy and other sexual acts between men (while saying nothing whatsoever about lesbian activity, which some male legislators refused either to take seriously or to believe possible). For almost one hundred years, the potential for prosecution under this statute had been far more than a threat; it had been a common occurrence. The all-too-frequent blackmailing, harassment, arrest, and imprisonment of gay men throughout the 1950s in particular rendered the story of Oscar Wilde no mere historical curiosity,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

locked in the past, but a narrative with immediate application. Indeed, the targeting of homosexuals in England had worsened since the early 1950s, after the revelations involving Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean—spies who had defected to the Soviet Union in 1951 and handed over British classified intelligence, and who were presented in the press as members of a "homosexual ring," solidifying the Cold War link between being gay and being a Communist traitor.

But the late 1950s had opened the possibility of a shift in the legal status of male homosexuality, thanks to an unexpected governmental initiative. In September 1957, Sir John Wolfenden, the Vice Chancellor of Reading University, along with a committee of fifteen that included several members of Parliament, clergy, and a judge, released the much anticipated findings of their study of homosexuality and of prostitution, which the British Home Secretary had commissioned three years earlier. The original charge given to the committee had been "to consider, among other matters, the law and practice relating to homosexual offences and the treatment of persons convicted of such offences by the courts and to suggest any changes which in the committee's opinion were desirable" (Hyde 2). The *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution,* which came to be known as the "Wolfenden Report," boldly recommended "that homosexual behavior between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offense" (Miller 283). The grounds for this decision involved notions of privacy, as well as the sanctity of individual liberty. "We do not think that it is proper for the law to concern itself with what a man does in private unless it can be shown to be contrary to the public good" (Hyde 229). The committee decided that it could document no public harm arising from such private acts.

In *The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name: A Candid History of Homosexuality in Britain,* H. Montgomery Hyde writes that the Wolfenden Report's conclusion "received a very largely favourable press, and was welcomed by practically every organization which had submitted evidence to it, as well as by leading spokesmen of most of the Christian denominations" (233). But polls taken at the time also indicated that the British electorate's attitudes lagged somewhat behind this reform-minded stance. As Neil Miller notes in *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present,* "A Gallup poll showed that 38 percent of Britons backed decriminalization, while 47 percent wanted to keep the law. In Scotland, opposition was even stronger: A poll by the *Scottish Daily Record* showed an overwhelming 85 percent against decriminalization" (284). The Tory Party, which controlled the government at the time, used these gauges of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

public feeling as an excuse to delay action on the committee's chief recommendation, and essentially to let the Wolfenden Report die, without introducing a bill to amend the statutes under which men were being arrested and imprisoned. Those who favored a change of law realized immediately that if the Tories' justification for inaction was to be "public opinion," then public opinion would have to be made to shift. The post-Wolfenden years—especially the early 1960s—therefore saw a flood of new works from the arts community that made the case for decriminalization, sometimes in subtle and sometimes in more overt fashion. Into the category of representations designed to plead either implicitly or explicitly for legal reform fell the sudden proliferation of biographical representations of the most famous example of martyrdom under the Labouchère Amendment—Oscar Wilde.

By 1961, the British director Basil Dearden would feel able to explore more directly, in a contemporary setting, the fear of criminal prosecution and the consequent exploitation of gay men by threats of blackmail through his film *Victim*, which Vito Russo has called a "thriller that pleaded tolerance for homosexuals, the first commercial film to do so since the German *Anders als die Anderen* in 1919" (128). Dearden's fictional film has received considerable critical attention in recent years, especially from Queer Studies historians. The Wilde biopics, on the other hand, have met with the fate of oblivion and silence. Even Russo's otherwise quite comprehensive *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* is guilty of such neglect, failing to mention either of the Wilde films even once. But I would suggest that Basil Dearden's seemingly groundbreaking film was made possible—and was made a success—by the cultural and political work accomplished by the two Oscar Wilde biopics that came shortly before it.

When the Wolfenden Report was released, it attracted so much attention that Sir John was said to have joked about having even "received an offer from America for the film rights" (Hyde 233). Although America had no part in the events that followed, the joke as it happened proved prescient. In *Oscar Wilde*, directed by Gregory Ratoff (the first of the two works to be completed), and in the Ken Hughes film titled *The Green Carnation* in England, but retitled *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* for its American release, audiences found film versions of the Wolfenden committee's conclusions. Both biopics made the events of 1895 in Wilde's career serve as vehicles for passionate cinematic arguments in favor of the decriminalization of gay male sexual conduct under British law. The intentions of these two films were therefore quite different from more recently produced representations of Wilde's life story, such as Brian Gilbert's 1997

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*Wilde,* which have presupposed a shared outrage on the part of gay and straight viewers alike at the fate of the martyr—representations that play, in a sense, to the already persuaded. On the contrary, the two 1960 British biopics had first to generate and then construct that response, using Wilde as the mask through which to speak to their contemporaries about the legal outrages being committed against gay men of the day.

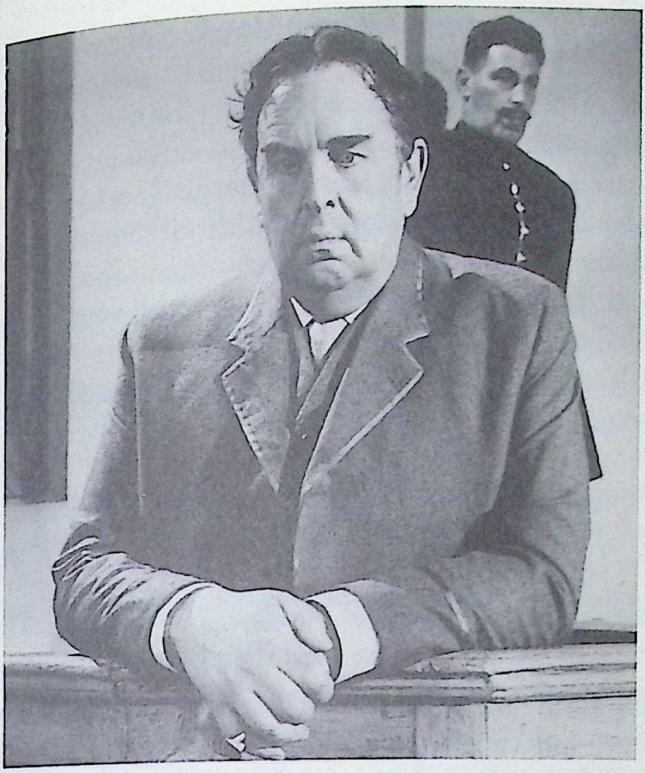
This slant of the Wilde biopics intersected with a related contemporary phenomenon, which Marcia Landy has identified in *Cinematic Uses of the Past*—another recent work of scholarship that fails to mention either of the Wilde films at all, though each is clearly related to the theme of her study. Landy writes at length of the popularity in Great Britain during the 1950s and 1960s of the "social problem" film:

> The social problem film was particularly sensitive to the "news of the day" and to immediate social issues that were identified with journalism, social science research, and legislative-political developments. . . . The scripts were often based on contemporary novels, biographies, or exposés. . . . The narratives focused on threats to the family, criminality, prostitution, same-sex sexuality, juvenile delinquency, and to a much lesser extent racial tensions. Such films as *Sapphire* (1959) dramatized the social problem of race, while *Victim* (1960) [actual date 1961] addressed the social problem of homosexuality. (199)

The influence of the commonly held perspectives of such films, which constructed homosexuality itself as a "social problem," can be felt quite strongly in the first of the Wilde biopics, *Oscar Wilde,* with its screenplay cowritten by Jo Eisinger and director Gregory Ratoff. Here, two views of male homosexuality in British society clash uncomfortably in the courtroom scene where Wilde's fate is decided. On the one hand, Ratoff and Eisinger stage this scene as a vindication of homosexual romance as a noble way of life. To achieve maximum impact upon the audience, the famous defense of the "Love that dare not speak its name" that Wilde made in the first of the three trials (Ellmann 435) is moved instead to the climax of the third trial and offered just before sentencing. Robert Morley, as Wilde, recites the lines with the intensity of a Shakespearean soliloquy, and manages to do so in a single take without blinking, as Ratoff lights Morley's face and wide-staring eyes in such a manner as to suggest spiritual transfiguration. The effect of this visual beatification is to make plain the injustice of the legal punishment that follows. But at the same time, Ratoff and Eisinger undercut the positive nature of the representation by introducing the courtroom scene with a voice-over by Morley, in which Wilde blames himself for his own downfall. Indeed, the word "blame" occurs twice in this commentary.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Robert Morley in the dock in *Oscar Wilde* (© 1960 Four City). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

as the voice of Wilde absolves the Marquess of Queensberry of responsibility for the course of the events: "But the blame for this final disaster lay not on his shoulders nor on those of his son, whom he hated so bitterly. No man is destroyed except by his own hand. And so I blame only myself."

This second, competing view of homosexuality as the "problem" to be acknowledged and faced, both by Wilde and by others, is reinforced throughout the film by suggestions that Wilde's desires are symptomatic of a self-destructive compulsion, over which the subject can exercise no control. In a room at the Cadogan Hotel, where Wilde did in fact await his arrest in 1895, Ratoff and Eisinger stage a tear-jerking farewell to his wife Constance and older son Cyril (neither of whom was actually present when the police constables came for him). "It was as if someone had written me into a play," Oscar tells Constance sorrowfully and apologetically, "I had to go on, scene by scene. I could see the final disaster, but I couldn't stop." The deliberate ambiguity of his phrasing leaves it to the cinema audience to decide whether the reference is to the specific pursuit of the libel action against Queensberry or to the more general pursuit of Queensberry's son and of the "rent boys" they shared.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

In a way that is often consistent with the conventions of the "problem" drama of the early 1960s, *Oscar Wilde* turns its subject's homosexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas into a troubling development, not merely for Wilde and his family, but for the surrounding social network. The script features a confrontation with George Alexander, the actor manager, on the eve of the latter's production of Wilde's new play, *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Here, Alexander is made to speak for the arts community, as he berates Wilde for flouting public opinion and consorting openly with Douglas. Alexander angrily objects to Wilde's announced intention to be present at the first night, despite the fact that his appearance will provoke gossip and censure:

> Don't you think that for once you might consider me and the rest of the cast? The way you live your life is your own affair, but the way we present your play tonight is ours. How can you expect a good performance, if you deliberately distract the attention of the audience by the presence of Lord Alfred and yourself in the box?

The dialogue suggests that failure to abide at least by the rules of the closet may be tantamount to selfishness on Wilde's part, a selfishness disruptive to both social life and to the arts. But a moment later, the conservative heterosexual viewer's sympathies are re-engaged by Wilde's humble capitulation to Alexander's point of view. "A man in my position cannot afford scandal," Wilde says contritely, "I promise you I'll be more careful," agreeing to forego attendance at the opening night of his own play.

Needless to say, this scene between Alexander and Wilde is a wholly imaginary one. No evidence exists that Alexander ever discussed Wilde's behavior with him or encouraged him to stay away from the theatre. The playwright was indeed present, triumphantly so, when *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuted, but here in the film, Wilde's self-sacrificial conduct is supposed to endear him to an otherwise disapproving straight audience and to demonstrate why no punishment, through criminal prosecution or other legal means, of the male homosexual could be seen as warranted. The police have no place here, for the gay man, as embodied by Wilde, can be trusted to police his public actions himself. Nevertheless, by ceding ground and retreating to the position that homosexuality is a psychological compulsion that could sometimes make a man his own worst enemy and turn him into a "problem" for himself and others, Ratoff's and Eisinger's biopic continually offsets its cinematic arguments in favor of decriminalization of male homosexuality.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*The Green Carnation,* released as *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* in the U.S., approaches the same subject matter quite differently. Unlike the ones identified by Marcia Landy, this film declines to construct homosexuality as a social problem; rather, by seeing Wilde's fate as entirely undeserved and his way of life as in no sense blameworthy, *The Green Carnation* presents homophobia as the social problem. To enhance the authoritative nature of this reading of Wilde's story, this second 1960 biopic, written and directed by Ken Hughes, begins with a prominent display of its scholarly pedigree in the opening credits. There it not only states that the film has been based on two different sources—a non-fiction account titled *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* by the literary critic and biographer H. Montgomery Hyde, and a play called *The Stringed Lute* by John Furnell—but that it has used two unimpeachable historical advisers: Lord Cecil Douglas, the then Marquess of Queensberry and lateral descendant of Wilde's aristocratic lover "Bosie," and Vyvyan Holland, Wilde's only surviving son.

The intentions of Ken Hughes's biopic are unambiguous. *The Green Carnation* continually shapes the events of Wilde's life before, during, and after 1895, the year of the arrest and trials, to demonstrate to a mainstream audience, presumed to be heterosexual and somewhat conservative, that 1) male homosexuality poses no threat to the existing British social order; 2) homosexual acts ought to be decriminalized; and 3) the true menace to the fabric of society is actually the rabid homophobe. To achieve these aims, however, and to shift the attitudes of viewers so as to bring them in line with the proposals of the Wolfenden Report, the biopic must, to some degree, construct a defanged and denatured "Oscar Wilde." If Wilde is to serve as the posterchild for a newly positive understanding of the homosexual as harmless, then the filmic Wilde cannot also be what the original was to his contemporaries, and by his own choice: the very embodiment of challenge to British complacency, the overturner of certitudes, and the prophet of a new age, in which the Artist (with a capital "A") will be the maker of his own laws and the defiant breaker of those laid down by others. To the degree, therefore, that this biopic is true to its social agenda in the present, it cannot also afford to be true to certain aspects of its subject's life.

Ken Hughes's core argument about homosexuality reveals itself through a continuous sequence of four short scenes, each around five minutes in length, at the center of the filmed biography. The first of these takes place at Oscar Wilde's house in Tite Street during October 1894. Wilde has just recovered from a bout of illness, occasioned in part by an argument and temporary break-up with his younger lover, Lord Alfred Douglas (a.k.a.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

"Bosie"). As the action begins, the writer Ada Leverson (1862–1933) arrives and speaks sympathetically to Constance Lloyd Wilde, whom Wilde has married in 1884 and with whom he had two children, Cyril and Vyvyan.

The dynamic of the scene that ensues would have been quite familiar to audiences of the day, for it follows precisely the guidelines of conventional, heterosexual domestic melodramas with plots based upon adultery. As Niamh Baker explains, underlying the fictional or filmed melodramas of the 1950s was the persistence of "[a]ttitudes to adultery [that] still reflected the old 'double standard' of sexual morality. This meant that a husband who had lovers was viewed more benignly than a wife" (87). Speaking confidentially to Ada, Constance expresses no anger toward her husband, merely relief that his extramarital attachment to Bosie appears to have ended, and that he is all hers again. But she will prove to be mistaken. Wilde enters, triumphantly bearing the just-completed manuscript of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* and sends Constance scurrying to prepare for a celebration. With his wife out of the room, Wilde's false cheer collapses and he tells Leverson of his loneliness without Bosie and of romantic longings for him. A moment later, news arrives of the sudden death of Bosie's elder brother, Francis, the Viscount of Drumlanrig. Announcing that he must send a telegram at once to Bosie, who might need him, Wilde abruptly walks out on the domestic celebration, leaving Constance pathetically clutching the unopened bottle of champagne, a poor phallic replacement for the absent husband.

Throughout this scene, male homosexuality is presented in terms of romance, and as nothing more sinister than a violation of the code of monogamy—thus as the mirror image of male heterosexual adultery—with the gay partner of the husband as the equivalent of the "other woman." There is no mention here of Wilde's involvements with "rent boys" (that is, young male prostitutes), or of these sexual relationships as any part of the wife's concern. Instead, the gay relationship is defined in a way meant to be unthreatening to straight, conservative viewers—as bound up not with physical desire, but with romantic attachment, sentiment, affection and a sense of loyalty—and as presenting challenges to family life indistinguishable from those in a straight, adulterous context, such as might be found in a novel or filmed melodrama about an extramarital heterosexual affair. "Torn Between Two Lovers" could easily be the sentimental theme song in this scene, for this Wilde is not a man torn between domesticity and the underworld of male prostitutes and petty criminals. Although what Wilde called "feasting with panthers" was certainly an important feature of his erotic life, that aspect is wholly and carefully suppressed.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The scene that follows immediately transports the viewer to the estate of the Marquess of Queensberry, father of Bosie Douglas. In the aftermath of the funeral for Francis, a carefully closeted homosexual who had died in October 1894 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound that was ruled "accidental," Queensberry turns fiercely upon his remaining sons, Bosie and Percy, accusing them of being insufficiently masculine, and exclaiming that the only "real man" among his sons has died. (A fourth son, Sholto, who is not mentioned in this biopic, had been exiled to California earlier in 1894 as a way of keeping him out of trouble.) Even as Queensberry baits his sons and threatens them with violence, Bosie continues to comfort his silent, suffering mother, whose anguish this brutal husband deliberately and cruelly ignores.

In this scene and throughout the film as a whole, the villain of the piece will be Queensberry, the heterosexual man—indeed, the hyper-heterosexual man, who insists upon a macho ideal of masculinity, and whose homophobia is pathologized by the filmmaker as a symptom of his vicious and violent character. It is he who proves the real threat to the domestic sphere and thus to the foundations of society. He is depicted as a wife-batterer,

Queensberry (Lionel Jeffries) threatens Bosie (John Fraser) and Lady Queensberry (Cicely Paget-Bowman) in *The Green Carnation* (© 1960 Warwick Productions). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

which Queensberry in fact was, as a keeper of mistresses who has driven his wife out of her own home, and as the abuser of his children. In this biopic the homophobe becomes the destroyer of the family—not the gay son, who is chivalrously attentive to his mother.

As he launches into a tirade in which he asserts his right to have demanded that Bosie end the relationship with Wilde, Queensberry says, "I tried to protect you against yourself." By placing this notion in the mouth of a wholly discredited character, Ken Hughes thus foregrounds and de-legitimizes the argument current in 1960 that homosexuals could or should be "saved" from themselves. But Queensberry's most important utterance is the vindictive cry with which he ends the scene, as Bosie angrily drives away: "I'll see you both behind bars. Do you hear? Behind bars!" For this is the heart of *The Green Carnation*'s political position and the film's raison d'être. The only figure who talks of wanting to imprison homosexuals is in fact the chief lawbreaker himself, and no reasonable, law-abiding person would wish to be associated with such a figure or such a stance.

After a quick dissolve, the third scene in this sequence finds Wilde and Bosie in evening dress, reunited happily in a gentlemen's club (probably meant to be Wilde's club, the Albemarle). Bosie drinks to the success of the play *The Importance of Being Earnest,* which is just about to open. In turn, Wilde toasts Bosie with the words: "To the importance of friendship," emphasizing the sentimental and platonic, rather than erotic, connection between the two men. Yet, quite daringly, at the same time the camera also asks the viewer to empathize with gay male desire—to experience the sense of same-sex infatuation just as Wilde does, through the lengthy gaze that it holds on his look of yearning, and to share the recognition of Bosie's overpowering beauty and glamor. The final point-of-view shot gives us Wilde's starry-eyed view of Bosie, but also the camera's identical appreciation of his physical appeal, in which we, too, as gay or straight, as feminine or masculine spectators, participate. Anyone, the camera drives us to acknowledge, could have and would have fallen for Bosie. Thus, Wilde cannot be blamed for doing so, even by those in the audience who might otherwise resist accepting the legitimacy of male-to-male sexual orientation. (By making Antonio Banderas the universally desirable fantasy figure to whom no lover, of whatever orientation, could imagine saying "no," Jonathan Demme would revive this strategy for his 1993 *Philadelphia.*)

The last of these four linked scenes plays fast-and-loose with historical accuracy, in order to dramatize a confrontation between the homophobe and—quite literally—the rest of the world. Employing as his backdrop the February 14, 1895, first night of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* Ken

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

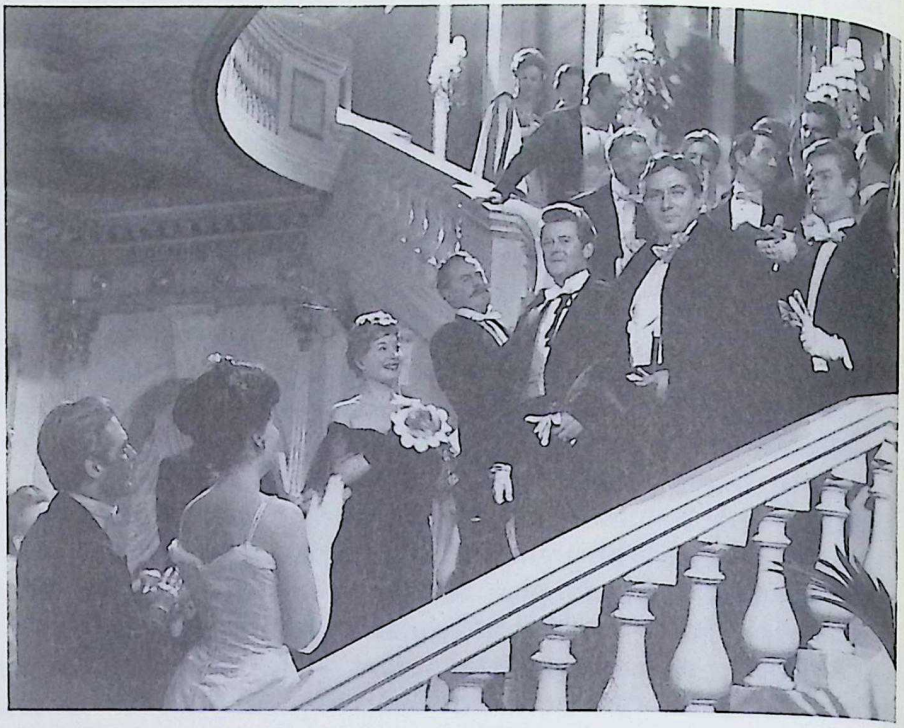
Hughes stages the scene as an occasion of simultaneous artistic and domestic triumph, both for Wilde and for the cause that he has been used to represent. It begins with the harmonious image of Wilde's wife and male lover together with him in the same theatre box, openly and publicly united. As this biopic attempts repeatedly to show its audience of 1960, homosexual pairings need not be considered disruptive either to marriage in particular or to the social order in general—certainly not any more than adulterous heterosexual triangles would be. Wives and male partners can find ways to get along; it is only Bosie's father, the violent and irrational homophobe, who constructs the gay relationship as damaging, whether to the family or to social norms. The "trois" here seem comfortably to work out a "ménage" that is tolerated by all. (In fact, Bosie was in Algiers at the time and thus had no part whatsoever in the events of that evening. Thus, while in *Oscar Wilde,* Ratoff and Eisinger removed Wilde from the scene that night, Hughes determined that his argument required Bosie's presence.)

In the same scene, Ken Hughes also depicts a deliberately utopian representation of the police not as the enemies of gay men, but as supportive figures. Amidst the roars of delight that greet Wilde's play, the action cuts away to an outside shot of the theatre, where Queensberry has appeared with a bouquet of stinking vegetables in hand, intending to hurl these at the stage, as he indeed attempted to do at the actual first-night performance at the St. James's. But he is stopped, and also chided for his objectionable behavior, by two representatives of the police: first, by a uniformed constable with a working-class accent; then by his supervisor in plain clothes, a man with the speech patterns of a slightly superior London class. Out of Queensberry's hearing, the two officers of the law engage in conversation about him, agreeing that he is "loose in the upper story," a judgment that will be echoed a moment later by a group of gentlemen of his own class, who look at him disapprovingly and proclaim him "mad." In this scene, the law is on the side of the homosexual who is being unjustly harassed. The gay-hater is the only person who proves lawless and outside the social order, and in this idealized version of history, he is acknowledged as such by figures drawn from all strata of the social hierarchy, even by the police.

At the actual premiere of the play, Queensberry was indeed barred from the theatre and frustrated in his efforts to create a commotion that would embarrass Wilde and spoil the success of the occasion. As Brian Roberts, historian of the Douglas family, reports in *The Mad Bad Line,* "After being refused admission at the box office, he boldly marched to the gallery entrance where he was . . . again turned away. After that, according to Wilde, he 'prowled about for three hours, then left chattering like a monstrous

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Peter Finch as Oscar ascendant in *The Green Carnation* (© 1960 Warwick Productions). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

ape'" (205). But the biopic remakes the past to underline its own pressing political agenda. Thus in Hughes's film, Queensberry breaches security and crashes his way into the theatre lobby, after the curtain has fallen. With Bosie close by his side, Wilde is still accepting congratulations from the departing crowd of the crème de la crème, which includes not only George Bernard Shaw, as the representative of the world of arts and letters, but the Prince of Wales himself. In a fury, Queensberry marches up to Wilde and presents him with the bouquet of cabbages as a gesture of contempt. But with smiling aplomb, Wilde merely says that the smell of the rotten vegetables will make him think of Queensberry—an insulting witticism that earns roars of approval from the crowd. Bosie, laughing triumphantly, remains with Wilde, and the camera pans to show the elite of society united with him in laughing disdainfully at Queensberry, who skulks away defeated.

Perhaps the most extraordinary detail of this scene—extraordinary for the comprehensiveness of the political statement that it implies—is the introduction of race. In the crowd of the elite theatre patrons near Wilde is

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

a representative of the nineteenth-century Empire, a dark-skinned figure in Western evening dress and a large turban, indicative of Hindu identity. As Queensberry moves in to insult Wilde, this extra is also moved into the foreground by the director. And as the crowd explodes in laughter at Queensberry's expense, the camera picks him out to focus upon his laughing face. Ken Hughes thus highlights the presence of this figure to show the whole of the British imperial order as on the side of the gay male couple in 1895, and by extension in 1960, jeering at the homophobe and casting out his poisonous influence. Every corner of British society, the audience of 1960 is to think, was and still would be able to accept and incorporate male homosexual relationships without any difficulty, if not for the pressure exerted by the dangerous anti-gay lunatic. It is he who ought to be the one expelled and shunned, as all reasonable people here agree, even across the lines of class, race, and religious tradition.

Ratoff's and Eisinger's biopic *Oscar Wilde* both begins and ends with an image of the famous Jacob Epstein-designed headstone in Père Lachaise cemetery, implying that Wilde, who is made to blame himself for his fate—called "the story of my tragedy" in an opening voice-over—was ultimately responsible for the events that led to his untimely death. In *The Green Carnation,* Oscar Wilde is not brought down by his own actions or by any lapses of judgment, but by an external villain, whose means of attack is through abuse and perversion of the legal system, which like the social order in general would otherwise allegedly have been on Wilde's side. This villain's desire to punish and imprison gay men, moreover, is represented as the true post-Freudian psychiatric disorder in the case—the displaced obsession of the father with his own son, whose love the father has forfeited through his antisocial, antifamily behavior. In Ken Hughes's 1960 biopic about Wilde, it is Queensberry and those who resemble him, rather than homosexuality, that is the true menace to British society.

But what of the film's presentation of its biographical subject? To represent homosexuality as offering no threat to heterosexual dominion, Ken Hughes must construct Oscar Wilde as the embodiment of harmlessness in general, with no subversive intent of any kind—no socialist politics, such as Wilde articulated in his essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," and no anti-bourgeois aesthetic principles either. Indeed, as played by the very straight, low-key, and rather stolid leading man Peter Finch, this is a Wilde who neither poses nor poses challenges. Hughes's screenplay erases all suggestions of the social hostility and disapprobation that had greeted Wilde from the start of his career as a dandy, as one who was out to shock and offend the British establishment through his manners and style, as well as his literary pronouncements. So, too, it expunges the history of Wilde's war

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

against middle-class values and assumptions of every sort in his daily life. And, of course, it homogenizes his troubling Irishness, which is alluded to only when Wilde, asked by his legal counsel to give his word as an English gentleman, says that he will give it instead as an Irish one. The fact, however, that Wilde's Irish identity is mentioned only in the context of an acceptable class status softens the effect, for "the gentleman" remains part of the fold in the eyes of the British viewer, whereas "the Irishman" might not. The "mask" of Oscar Wilde that Hughes creates has no Irish nationalist consciousness to mar its features, and can slip comfortably over the face of any educated Englishman, or anyone who identifies wishfully (and wistfully) with the upper-class life of clubs, theatre-going, and houses run by servants. Thus, *The Green Carnation* presents Wilde's case as a class-based argument for an end to the legal persecution of British male homosexuals in 1960, by illustrating that this is no way to treat a gentleman, even as it constructs Wilde simultaneously as a hapless, harmless Everyman.

But if Wilde must function here as the gay Everyman, then it is unsafe for him also to be Oscar. A biographical film dedicated to effecting direct social change by addressing itself to the preconceptions of a conservative audience is perhaps inevitably condemned to sacrifice complexity and ambiguity in the portrayal of its subject. As a "biopic," therefore, *The Green Carnation* is problematic. But as a political document, and as an example of how popular media can use a historical subject for the purposes of cultural intervention in the present, it is a fascinating case study. To some degree, moreover, it can be counted as a successful effort, or at least recognized for its contribution as part of a cumulatively successful movement. The proliferation of historical representations of Oscar Wilde that ushered in the 1960s opened up a safe space for discussion and debate in England of the criminal status of acts of "gross indecency" between men. In 1967 the laws were finally repealed. As Wilde himself might have noted with satisfaction, Life followed the lead of its master, Art, just as it always should.

## NOTES

1. *The Wildean,* the journal of the London-based Oscar Wilde Society founded in 1991, has tried to keep abreast of representations of Wilde in popular culture. Thus, its recent issues have contained notices or reviews of such diverse biographical works or pastiches as *Oscar,* a musical by James Clutton and Damian Landi; Walter Satterthwaite's novel, *The Wilde West,* a thriller set during Wilde's lecture tour of the United States in the 1880s; Mark Burgess's performance piece, *The Last First Night,* which moves from descriptions by Wilde and his contemporaries of the 1895 staging

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

of *The Importance of Being Earnest* to the story of Wilde's conviction; an audio cassette recording by Martin Jarvis of Gyles Brandreth's dramatization of the courtroom speeches, called *Great Trials: Oscar Wilde;* the 1985 BBC television mini-series, *Oscar;* and numerous revivals of Micheál Mac Liammóir's one-man show, *The Importance of Being Oscar.*

2. See "Who's Who in the Cast." *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Minetta Theatre, New York). *Playbill* 98, No. 7 (July 1998): 30.

## WORKS CITED


Baker, Niamh. *Happily Ever After? Women's Fiction in Postwar Britain, 1945–1960.* London: Macmillan, 1989.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.

Holland, Merlin. *The Wilde Album.* London: Fourth Estate, 1997.

Hyde, H. Montgomery. *The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name: A Candid History of Homosexuality in Britain.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1970.

Landy, Marcia. *Cinematic Uses of the Past.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.

Miller, Neil. *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present.* New York: Vintage, 1995.

Roberts, Brian. *The Mad Bad Line: The Family of Lord Alfred Douglas.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981.

Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies.* 1981. Rev. ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle.* New York: Viking, 1990.

Stokes, John. "The Essence, Not the Likeness." Rev. of *Wilde,* dir. Brian Gilbert, *Wilde* (screenplay) by Julian Mitchell, and *The Wilde Album,* by Merlin Holland. *Times Literary Supplement,* Oct. 24, 1997: 20.

——. *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles, and Imitations.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Varty, Anne. *A Preface to Oscar Wilde.* London: Longman, 1998.

Wilde, Oscar. "The Critic as Artist." *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde.* Ed. Richard Ellmann. New York: Random House, 1969. 340–408.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# BIOPICS AND POLITICS: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE RHODES MOVIES

JAMES BURNS

In 1997 the British Broadcasting Corporation screened a six hour dramatization of the life of the South African imperialist Cecil Rhodes. Titled simply *Rhodes,* the film was one of the most expensive and ambitious productions ever undertaken by the BBC, costing over £15 million and relying on support from American, Canadian, and South African public television. The final script was reportedly reviewed and approved by the Prime Ministers of South Africa and Zimbabwe. The program was eventually broadcast to countries throughout the world, including the United States, Australia, and Zimbabwe, the nation that had once been the colony of Rhodesia.

The series was the first Rhodes biography to be filmed in over sixty years, and only the second in the history of the cinema. And yet, though only two Rhodes films have ever been produced, since 1916 at least seven similar projects have been attempted. Why has there been so much interest in producing a Rhodes movie, and why have so few of them actually been made? An analysis of the history of the Rhodes biopics reveals that all attempts to film his life have been affected by the enormous shadow he continues to cast over Southern African politics. Since his death in 1902 Rhodes has become the most potent icon of the peculiar form of imperialism that took root in Southern Africa in the late nineteenth century, and eventually developed into the modern Apartheid state. Not surprisingly, politicians and administrators with a stake in the Rhodes legacy have influenced every attempt to film his life. Most of the proposed Rhodes biopics foundered on the ambivalence or hostility of Southern African regimes that feared the political ramifications of bringing his life to the screen. The two Rhodes films actually made only came off because they enjoyed the support


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

of Southern African governments. Predictably, both films inspired a contentious debate upon their release. This century of controversy reflects the extraordinary role Rhodes continues to play in the ongoing debate over the legacy of European imperialism in Southern Africa.

That Rhodes has intrigued so many filmmakers is hardly surprising. He was one of the most famous men of his generation, and since his death his name has been kept alive through the publication of dozens of biographies, and through the annual presentation of the Rhodes scholarships. Until 1980 he also had the distinction of having the settler-state of Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—named in his honor. Rhodes' fame was the result of an extraordinary and dramatic life story. Born into a middle-class English family in 1853, as a young man he was diagnosed with a respiratory ailment, and sent to South Africa for his health. There he worked with an older brother at the newly discovered diamond mines of Kimberly. In the rough and tumble frontier environment of Kimberly, Rhodes established himself as a shrewd and ruthless businessman. Within two decades of his arrival in South Africa he had established De Beers Consolidated Mines, which soon controlled 90 percent of the world's diamond trade. His wealth gave him an entree into South African politics, which he came to dominate, becoming the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1890. In his youth Rhodes had become obsessed with the idea of expanding British rule deep into the hinterland of the Cape Colony's northern border. In 1889, when the British government refused to support his schemes, he raised a private army, and conquered the Shona and Matabele kingdoms, establishing a chartered colony that he subsequently called Rhodesia. As the leader of the Cape Parliament, and with nearly unlimited financial resources at his disposal, he intensified his campaign to turn his dream into a reality. Rhodes also tried to draw the small Afrikaner states in the Transvaal and Orange River regions into a federation dominated by the Cape Colony. When Afrikaner leaders resisted his encroachment, Rhodes provoked them into launching the disastrous Anglo-Boer War of 1899. When he died at age 49 in 1902, South Africa was in the midst of the war he had helped to bring about.

Different communities in Britain and Southern Africa have chosen to remember Rhodes in different ways. To colonial apologists in Britain, Rhodes remains a heroic figure who devoted himself tirelessly to the expansion of the British Empire. For the English-speaking communities in South Africa and Rhodesia, Rhodes was an altruistic visionary who sacrificed his health and fortune to bring "progress" to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. To the rural Afrikaners in South Africa he remains a villainous character, remembered for orchestrating the invasion of the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Transvaal in 1894, and for provoking the Anglo-Boer War. His legacy among the indigenous peoples of his erstwhile colony is more complicated. During the colonial era many Rhodesian Africans equated his name with the oppressive rule of a white settler elite. Some Africans who hoped to assimilate into the colonial order, however, embraced him as a champion of a race-blind colonial society, epitomized by Rhodes' oft-quoted dictum "equal rights for all civilized men south of the Zambezi."[2]

This is the contradictory and ambivalent legacy that has faced the makers of the Rhodes' biopics. The first recorded attempt to bring this story to the screen was undertaken early in the history of the cinema. In 1916, a South African production company, African Film Productions (AFP), approached the government of Southern Rhodesia about the possibility of filming a Rhodes biography in the colony.[3] The driving force behind AFP was William Schlesinger, an American-born producer whose company enjoyed a stranglehold on film production and distribution in South Africa. With the aid of the South African Government, AFP had already produced several popular films based on the history of white expansion in Southern Africa.[4] However, when Schlesinger's agents approached the government of Southern Rhodesia about making their film in the colony, they received a chilly reception. With many of the colony's white settlers off fighting in the First World War, the government was unwilling to permit the arming of African extras for the staging of battle scenes. The Private Secretary for the Administrator of the city of Bulawayo informed Schlesinger's representative, Harold Shaw, that AFP would not be permitted to reenact warfare between white troops and Matabele warriors. The government's fear stemmed from reports that the filming of another Schlesinger production which depicted the victory of the Boer soldiers over Zulu warriors at the Battle of Blood River in 1838, had led to violence in South Africa. Southern Rhodesian officials remained opposed to AFP's project, despite Schlesinger's promise that his film would provide much needed international exposure for the colony. Fearing that a Rhodes film would, in the words of one administrator, "injure European prestige," colonial officials suggested that Schlesinger film his biopic in South Africa.[5] In the event, AFP abandoned its plans. The first Rhodes film thus foundered on the obstruction of the rulers of Southern Rhodesia, who feared the residual bitterness Rhodes had engendered among the conquered peoples of his colony.[6]

During the late 1920s, several new plans for Rhodes biopics surfaced. In each of the final three years of the decade separate parties approached the Southern Rhodesian government, requesting permission to make a Rhodes film in the colony. Again, Southern Rhodesian officials proved cool to the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

suggestions. The first two efforts (which sought funds from the Beit trust, a philanthropic foundation administered in conjunction with the government of Southern Rhodesia) foundered on the administration's lack of cooperation. But Rhodesian officials found a third attempt more difficult to ignore. It enjoyed the backing of J. Bruce Woolf, the president of British Instructional Films, a leading British production company. In 1929, Woolf informed High Commissioner F. J. Newton, the British Government's representative in Southern Rhodesia, that he and the best-selling Tory novelist John Buchan were in the process of writing a script for a film about Rhodes. Faced with the well-funded Woolf and his high-profile collaborator, the High Commissioner was forced to explain his opposition to the proposed film. In doing so he became the first of many colonial administrators who would articulate the opinion that Rhodes was not a suitable subject for the cinema:

> I confess the whole idea of a film incorporating Rhodes is repugnant to me. . . . Perhaps Rhodes is a little too recent; and there are one or two episodes in his career which would make it difficult to treat the subject in a popular and, at the same time, truthful manner. I am, therefore, inclined to drop the idea.

Faced with official resistance, the Woolf film was ultimately never produced.[7]

During the 1930s, two generic trends encouraged movie moguls to keep trying to bring Rhodes to the screen. The first was the growing popularity of biographical films. Beginning with the screen life of *Disraeli* (1929), the decade saw a spate of biopics that chronicled the lives of a host of historical figures—most famously Charles Laughton as Henry VIII and Marlene Dietrich as Catherine the Great, but also more prosaic subjects, like Alexander Graham Bell, played in a 1939 production by Don Ameche. The second pertinent genre of the thirties was the imperial epic. Led by the Hungarian-born British producer Alexander Korda, British and American movie studios churned out a series of such films, including *Gunga Din* (1933), *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935), *King Solomon's Mines* (1937), and *The Four Feathers* (1939). Several films capitalized on the popularity of both genres, including 1935's *Clive of India,* and the 1939 production of *Stanley and Livingstone.*[8]

Given these trends, it is not surprising that by 1934 three more production companies had announced plans to film Rhodes' life.[9] In 1933 British Gaumont began preparing a life of Rhodes based on a recently published biography by Sarah Gertrude Millins. The following year British National Films approached Winston Churchill to write a script for a Rhodes film, though he declined because he was currently under contract writing imperial epics for Alexander Korda (Gough-Yates 212). Meanwhile, in the United States, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer began producing a Rhodes film of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

its own. In the event, only one of the three films was actually made. British National Films abruptly abandoned its project in 1934, apparently at the request of the South African Deputy Prime Minister, Jan Smuts. The involvement of Smuts in the affair marked an important moment in the history of the Rhodes' films. Smuts was an Afrikaner who had risen to prominence fighting the British during the Anglo-Boer War, which Rhodes had done so much to provoke. During his long career in politics Smuts helped to quash two Rhodes films, and hampered the production of a third. Though he had fought against British troops in 1899, his opposition to the Rhodes biographies was not necessarily personal. As a politician Smuts represented moderate Afrikaners who were willing to be reconciled to British rule. It was because of his role as a bridge between the English and Afrikaner communities in South Africa that he so forcefully resisted the making of these Rhodes films, which he feared would exacerbate tensions between the different white communities in Southern Africa (Gutsche 338–39).

With one Rhodes film out of the way, Afrikaner politicians set their sites on the British Gaumont production. In July of 1934 the South African Prime Minister, General Hertzog, contacted Gaumont, asking them to use caution in filming scenes that might "excite racial prejudice." His letter led to discussions between Gaumont representatives and General Smuts that ultimately ended in the South African government withdrawing its objections to the film (Gutsche 338–39). Meanwhile, in Southern Rhodesia the main concern about the making of a Rhodes film continued to be the very real possibility that the filming of action scenes would lead to violence. Having already fended off several proposed lives of Rhodes, in 1934 the Southern Rhodesian government found itself faced with the prospect of a screen biography produced by MGM. Playing on fears that an American production company was likely to take immense, and possibly unflattering, liberties with Rhodes' life, British Gaumont wrote to the Dominions Office, the branch of the British Government responsible for Southern Rhodesian affairs, asking for permission to film in the colony. The nationalist appeal was explicit: "We hope you will agree that, if this film is to be made, it should be made by a British company rather than by an American." Gaumont also promised that Southern Rhodesian officials would be granted oversight over the film's production, explaining that "we are prepared to be guided, and to some extent controlled by the wishes of official authority." The company agreed as well to employ consultants "who were in some cases associated with Rhodes, and in all cases are anxious for his character and work to be brought to the screen accurately and sympathetically."[10]

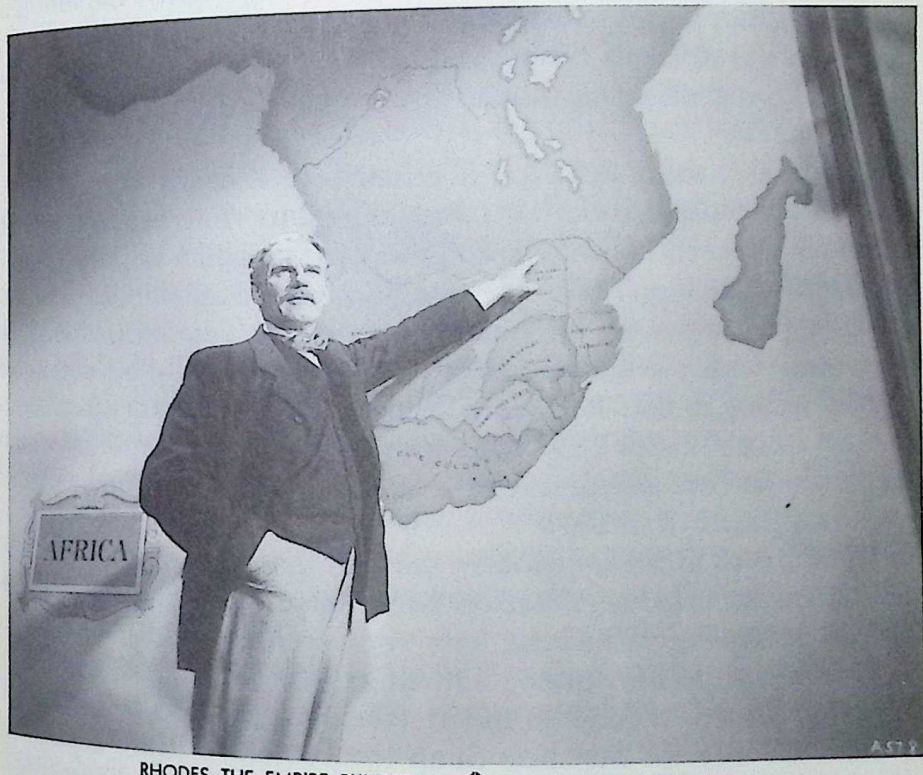
Small wonder, then, that the Southern Rhodesian government finally relented in 1934 and threw its support behind the British Gaumont production. Faced with two competing ventures, MGM abandoned its project

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and by the time British Gaumont sent cameraman Geoffrey Barkas to Southern Rhodesia in 1935 to film the action scenes for their movie, theirs was the only biopic still in production. Gaumont cast the Canadian-born, U.S. actor Walter Huston in the title role, but were forced to use a double to film the outdoor scenes when he proved unwilling to travel to Africa. The project enjoyed the full support of the Southern Rhodesian authorities. Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins instructed officials to provide Barkas with every assistance, which included supplying the camera crew with telephone service, and helping them recruit extras for the battle scenes.

Back in Britain, Gaumont head Michael Balcon, an ardent British patriot who wanted the film to popularize the achievements of the British Empire, both at home and abroad, set about producing a film that would glorify Rhodes' life without inflaming Afrikaner sensibilities. Though Berthold Viertel, an artist with left-leaning, anti-imperialist sympathies, was chosen to direct the film, he was allowed little influence on the drafting of the script (which was based on a hagiographic account of Rhodes'




Publicity still for *Rhodes of Africa* (© 1936 British Gaumont).
Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

life).[11] As a result, the film, titled *Rhodes of Africa* and released in 1936, wa a crude celebration of late nineteenth century imperialism—"a classic ca of cinematic whitewashing," as film historian Jeffrey Richards has describe it (*Visions* 140).

*Rhodes of Africa* focuses on the idealism of its protagonist. Paying sca attention to Rhodes' early years in Africa, his career in politics, or h involvement in the Anglo-Boer War, it concentrates instead on the co quest of Rhodesia, which is represented as a noble act intended to "civiliz the "savage" inhabitants, and to protect them from one another. The ce tral conflict is between Rhodes and the intransigent Afrikaners of the Sou African Republic, represented by their leader Paul Kruger, played by Osc Homolka as a dour but canny patriarch. The film's climactic scenes are tw tense meetings between Rhodes and Kruger. In the first, they argue becau Rhodes has out-maneuvered Kruger's representative in his dealings wit the Matabele King Lobengula. In the second, a wary Kruger listens Rhodes pleads for the life of his friend Leland Starr Jameson, who ha launched an unauthorized and unsuccessful invasion of the Afrikane republic. Though Kruger is presented as a man of integrity, the film ult mately blames him for the subsequent conflict between the Afrikaners an the English. His suspicious nature, and unwillingness to recognize Rhode as an agent of progress, brings about the eventual conflict between the tw white communities.

The film takes many historical liberties. Several of the most dramati sequences are complete fabrications, including a meeting between Rhode and the Matabele chief Lobengula, and the scene in which Rhodes bargain with Kruger for Jameson's life. The film also exonerates Rhodes from an responsibility for Jameson's ill-fated invasion of the Transvaal, and gene ally represents him as a man frequently misunderstood by his detractors and loyally willing to take the blame for his friends. It makes no referenc to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899, and ends abruptly with a title informin the audience that Rhodes' dream of a South Africa united under Britis rule was finally realized in 1910.

In its efforts to avoid controversy the film ignores several of the mos remarkable events of Rhodes' career. Most surprisingly from a dramati standpoint, it also leaves out the only two moments in Rhodes' life i which he is known to have placed himself in physical danger. The first o these was his famous "indaba" in the Matabele war of 1895, when he ven tured unarmed into the Matabele camp to negotiate a peace settlement. The second was his role in organizing the defense of the garrison a Kimberly when the city was under siege during the Anglo-Boer War. Whil

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the film's desire to gloss over Rhodes' combat against Afrikaner troops is understandable, the absence of the indaba scene seems inexplicable. In her memoir of the filming of *Rhodes of Africa,* Natalie Barkas, wife of the cameraman, insisted that the scene was shot, but was edited out because of the impending crisis brewing in Ethiopia when the film was released in 1936.[12]

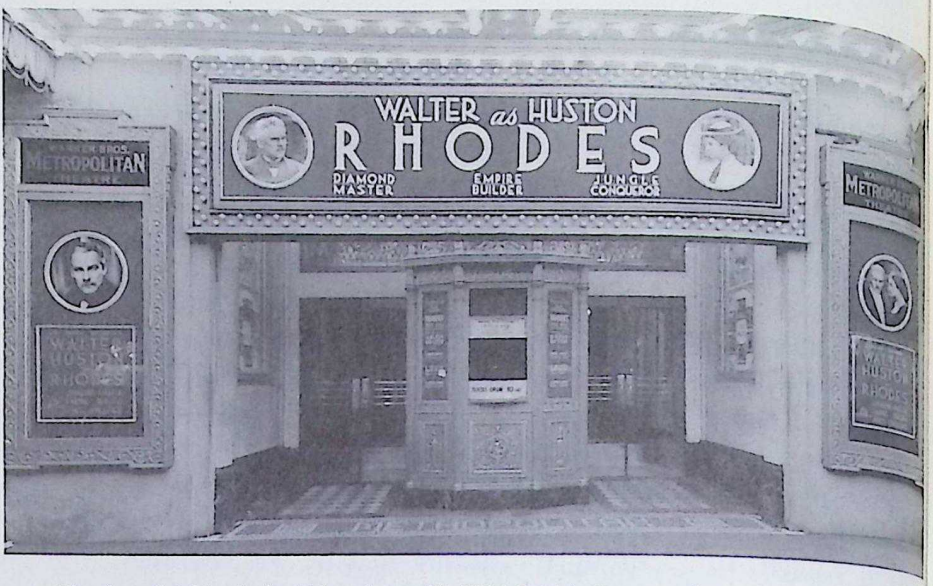
Despite the best efforts of the filmmakers to water down Rhodes' life story, the film inspired a firestorm of criticism among the white communities in South Africa.[13] Anticipating the crisis, Smuts had asked for a special private screening of the film before its premiere. Suspecting that the general was trying to quash another Rhodes film, the South African press decried his meddling, but when the film was released in May of 1936, it drew sharp criticism from both the English and the Afrikaner press, justifying Smuts' concern. Though both camps lamented the film's egregious historical inaccuracies, the Afrikaner press took particular offense at the portrayal of President Kruger, complaining specifically that he was represented as an inhospitable host, and someone who would read the Bible while smoking. Because the film portrayed conflict between the two white communities in Southern Africa personified by Rhodes and Kruger, the South African government banned the film for all African audiences—and because Southern Rhodesian film distribution was controlled by South Africa, thus effectively banned the film there as well. Though the film's many inventions raised a few eyebrows in Southern Rhodesia, the official reaction there was more bemused than concerned (since Africans in that colony were banned from seeing it). Sir Weston Jarvis, one of the film's consultants, remarked to Prime Minister Huggins that "of course Walter Huston, who portrays Rhodes, is no more like him than I am. In fact he is exactly like that ruffian Ramsay Macdonald." Jarvis also pointed out such fabrications in the script as the invented meeting between Rhodes and Lobengula.[14]

And what of America? Despite the controversy in Southern Africa—which ultimately forced director Berthold Viertel to publish a letter in the London *Times* defending the film's dramatic license (Gough-Yates 215)—in the United States the film opened to some favorable reviews and respectable audiences.[15] Gaumont had correctly reckoned that Rhodes' name would resonate with American audiences, and though hardly a smash success, the film fared better than most of Gaumont's catalogue in the U.S.[16]

Though the tempest stirred up by the release of *Rhodes of Africa* seemed to prove that his story was too controversial for the Southern African screen, new plans for yet another Rhodes epic were mooted less than a decade later. In the late 1930s, the Southern Rhodesian government became interested in making motion pictures that would popularize the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri




*Rhodes of Africa* in its U.S. release (© 1936 British Gaumont).
Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

country to potential settlers in Great Britain. The government hired British Gaumont to produce three documentaries: *Land of Rhodes, The Pioneer Trail,* and *The Highlands of Rhodesia.* When London theaters refused to show the films, however, the government became frustrated, and it shelved its public relations efforts for the duration of the second world war.[17] In early 1945, however, the Information Office began planning a feature length, dramatic film that presumably would be easier to distribute. Discussions began with the British movie studio Arthur Rank. The film, which was never made, would have been titled *There Lies Your Hinterland,* taking its title from the inscription found on the statue of Rhodes that stands in Capetown, South Africa. Supposedly one of four stories the studio would produce about the empire, the proposed film's scriptwriter, a South African named Roger Bray, sent an outline of his story to Lanigan O'Keefe, the High Commissioner of Southern Rhodesia, in early February of 1945. Though the script itself is lost, the discussion of it within the Southern Rhodesian administration sheds light on this new attempt to bring Rhodes to the big screen. Bray attempted to avoid the controversy surrounding the 1936 film by taking even greater liberties with Rhodes' career. Like all screenwriters who tackled this subject, Bray had to deal with the role played by Rhodes in fomenting the Anglo-Boer War. He solved this thorny problem by introducing German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck into the story.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

as a villain sowing distrust between the two white communities of Southern Africa (when Bray drafted the script, Germany was still at war with Britain). Bray's explanation to the High Commissioner deserves quoting at length:

> You will observe that the new viewpoint gives to Rhodes a much deeper and more logical motive for those amazing years of achievement and action, the years of 1886–1896, than is contained in any record. And I put it forward as a South African who deeply admires the almost religious idealism which prompted Rhodes in building his North—now our hinterland. I believe the presentation of Rhodes as one of the great crusaders along these lines, ignoring the mistakes of the Rand Raid, placing the "threat" upon Bismarck, and in much lesser degree upon Portuguese interests, is the correct outlook and will do more to reveal the real Rhodes than dwelling upon any controversial issues which rake up Afrikander [sic] feeling.

After reading the script, W. D. Gale, the Information Officer of Southern Rhodesia, sent his own extensive response to the Secretary of Native Affairs for the colony:

> it is a novel approach to Rhodes' motives in colonising Rhodesia, perhaps the only approach that will enable a film of this period to be made without exacerbating racial feeling in the Union. The only danger is that by glossing over Rhodes' material motives (the development of Mashonaland's reputed goldfields) his character may be presented in an over-glorious light. But within the scope of a film of this kind, which demands character treatment from one predominant angle, I agree that an excellent purpose should be served in presenting him as the great Imperialist and Empire builder rather than as the financial realist who was pretty ruthless in dealing with opposition—justifiably so, in my mind.

And finally, the Secretary's response to Gale, recorded as marginalia in the original letter—

> History should be presented factually down to the last detail—in other words fiction and fact should not be mixed—I also realize if this were done it would probably ruin the movie business.[18]

The 1945 Rank film would be the last attempt to produce a Rhodes biopic for fifty years. In 1948 Afrikaner nationalists won elections in South Africa on a platform of "apartheid," or separation of the white and African communities, and their party remained in control of the country until 1994. Though South Africa developed a robust cinema industry during the apartheid era, the government's control of film production through state subsidies and censorship made it highly unlikely that anyone would produce a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

film about Rhodes.[19] Between 1948 and 1980, Southern Rhodesia also ha an active government cinema unit, which made several fiction films about th history of the colony. But when it returned to making movies to popularize the colony abroad, it ignored the eponymous founder of the country in favo of the less controversial character of David Livingstone, the saintly missiona ary who had been the first white man to explore the region.[20] As for British and American studios, after the war they lost their enthusiasm for the biopic and the imperial epic. Films with imperial subjects made during the fifties and sixties were essentially American Westerns set in Africa or India. Thus with the conspicuous exceptions of films like *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Khartoum,* the imperial biopic held little allure for post-war moviemakers. In this climate, no Rhodes film would be made for fifty years. The next biopic would have to await a major political change in Southern Africa, and in the West's perception of Rhodes and his imperial mission.

These changes developed gradually during the 1960s and 1970s, as the imperial powers vacated Africa, and apartheid came to appear increasingly reactionary to European and American observers. After police massacred African protesters in the Soweto township in 1976, the shift in international opinion against South Africa accelerated, and by the early 1980s, the country had become an international pariah. In 1985, the leaders of the Commonwealth nations—a body South Africa had left in 1961 over racial policies—called on South Africa to free the anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela; unban the African National Congress (ANC), his party, and dismantle apartheid. Shortly thereafter the United States Congress began calling for economic sanctions against the South African government, and the European Community and the United States instituted a boycott against South African athletes.

As South Africa increasingly came to be viewed as a renegade state, it became a favorite target of Western filmmakers. Beginning with 1987's *Cry Freedom,* a biopic based on the life of the murdered anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko, over the next eight years British and American studios produced a string of films which focused on the racism and violence of apartheid, including *A World Apart* (1987), *A Dry White Season* (1989), *The Power of One* (1991), *Sarafina* (1991), and *Cry the Beloved Country* (1995).[21] And in such Hollywood action pictures as *Lethal Weapon II* (1990), South Africans found themselves portrayed as latter-day Nazis.

Thus in 1984, when South African filmmaker Antony Thomas produced a script for a new Rhodes biography, conditions had definitely changed. Raised in the English speaking community, where he was taught to revere Rhodes as a hero, as Thomas grew older he came to question the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

myths surrounding Rhodes and the segregationist policies of his country's government. He became a supporter of the ANC and its program of violent struggle against the Afrikaner Nationalist regime. Interrogated and briefly imprisoned, he was eventually expelled by the South African authorities, and made his way to Britain, where he began a career making documentary films. An early production, entitled *A Touch of Churchill, a Touch of Hitler,* explored Rhodes' career. Thomas then went on to make a documentary trilogy about apartheid in South Africa, including the 1977 film *Six Days to Soweto.* By 1984 he was one of the best known and most controversial documentary producers in Britain.

After completing his script, Thomas secured the support of Zenith Films, a British production company that specialized in films for television. However, Thomas and Scott Meek, Zenith's head producer, agreed that they could not produce their film until there was a change in regime in South Africa. The film had to be made on location, and given the political climate of the mid-80s, when many organizations in Europe and the United States were divesting from South Africa, Thomas and Meek were unwilling to work there (Quill).[22] In the late 1980s, however, the political situation in South Africa began to change. In 1989, the pragmatic Afrikaner politician F. W. de Klerk replaced the hard-liner P. K. Botha as Prime Minister, and soon signaled his willingness to release Nelson Mandela from prison, and negotiate a settlement with the ANC. By the end of that year, Zenith had revived its plans for the Rhodes film, and in 1992 Thomas and Meek began organizing the film's production in South Africa, though it would take another two years before the actual filming began. By that time the BBC had become a major investor in the project.

The script reflects the rising tide of opposition to apartheid sweeping Europe and the United States during the late 1980s. Thomas portrays Rhodes as a malevolent figure who was complicit in the death of thousands of African miners and warriors, and who played an instrumental role in laying the foundations of apartheid. Intending to shock audiences with his iconoclastic portrait, in an August 17, 1996, interview Thomas told the South African *Independent,* "I hope viewers are appalled at Rhodes." In debunking the Rhodes myth, Thomas' script was in lockstep with popular opinion in both the United States and Great Britain. Indeed, as one reporter commented, "In these post apartheid times, anything other than a revisionist view of Cecil Rhodes as bringer of civilization to the otherwise damned natives would be pretty unthinkable, probably unfilmable and definitely unfundable" (Dening).

Though not surprisingly Thomas' Rhodes is the antithesis of the protagonist of *Rhodes of Africa,* the films share some interesting parallels.[23] The

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

producers of the 1936 version consulted with South African politicians, and accepted "guidance" from Southern Rhodesian authorities. Similarly, the script for the 1996 version was vetted by the new ruler of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, and by the future leader of South Africa, Nelson Mandela (Dening).[24] In its endorsement, the ANC's leadership stated that the script "got to the roots of the long history of exploitation and dispossession in South Africa" (Feuchtwanger). Zenith also asked for cooperation from the government of F. W. de Klerk, whose regime was still in power when production began, and even though it had "four professors of Afrikaans" review the script, the de Klerk government ultimately announced that it had no objections to the filming. The South African Broadcasting Corporation, however, remained wary, and did not agree to cooperate until the BBC had put the project into production (Feuchtwanger).

First appearing on British television in 1996, Thomas' *Rhodes* series ran for ten hours—almost six times longer than *Rhodes of Africa*—though the version eventually shown on American television was under six hours. Not surprisingly, then, this Rhodes biopic was much more comprehensive than the earlier film, beginning with Rhodes' arrival in South Africa, and documenting all the major events of his life, though its focus rests on his meteoric rise in the Kimberly diamond fields, his political career, the conquest of Mashonaland and Matabeleland, and his personal relationships.

Like scriptwriters before him, by focusing on the characters of Rhodes and Kruger, Thomas simplified the complicated conflicts within South Africa's European population. However, instead of laying the blame for conflict between Afrikaners and English at the feet of Kruger or Bismarck, Thomas makes the villain Rhodes himself. At every controversial moment in his career, Rhodes precipitates conflict and indulges in treachery. Rather than distancing him from responsibility for the wars that plagued Southern Africa during his lifetime, Thomas shows Rhodes attacking the Matabele and orchestrating Jameson's raid on the Transvaal. Rhodes also is seen introducing segregationist legislation in the Cape Parliament, in a scene intended to foreshadow the apartheid acts of the 1950s.

Thomas' script also reconstructs several incidents from Rhodes' life that were left out of *Rhodes of Africa*. The earlier film shied away from showing Africans fighting whites; *Rhodes* presents a horrifying recreation of a one-sided battle between the Matabele warriors and white mercenaries. The staging of the famous indaba with the Matabele, absent from the earlier version, captures both the charisma and treachery of the man. We see the unarmed Rhodes bravely negotiate a settlement with the Matabele leaders only to confide to a subordinate that he has no intention of honoring the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

agreement. *Rhodes* also unhesitatingly explores its protagonist's role in the Anglo-Boer war—conspicuously absent from *Rhodes of Africa.* Thomas' version implies that Rhodes instigated the conflict single-handedly. The more recent film's presentation of the actual war does not dwell on the fighting between British and Afrikaner soldiers, but instead focuses on Rhodes' role in undermining the authority of the British officer in charge of the besieged city of Mafeking—a selfish and irresponsible action that jeopardizes the safety of the garrison.

Like *Rhodes of Africa,* Thomas' *Rhodes* builds to a climactic encounter between Rhodes and Kruger. Once again the Afrikaner leader is presented as austere and dignified, and while Thomas does not repeat the gaffe of showing him smoking while consulting scripture, Kruger still clutches a bible to his breast as he speaks. Both films show Rhodes trying to reason with a suspicious Kruger. But while the 1936 Rhodes seems resigned when their negotiations reach an impasse, the Rhodes of 1996 becomes irrational, and is led away shouting threats at Kruger. Kruger then speaks to a gathering of somber Afrikaner families, and promises them that he will not allow the British to steal their farms. Overall, Thomas' *Rhodes* presents a generally positive image of the Afrikaners as noble farmers resolved to oppose the avaricious and volatile Rhodes—a portrait which may explain why the de Klerk government did not do more to discourage the production.

Like the release of *Rhodes of Africa* six decades earlier, the broadcast of *Rhodes* inspired a vigorous debate in the South African and Commonwealth press. Though in contrast to the controversy over the British Gaumont version, reviewers in Britain had a difficult time identifying specific historical inaccuracies, they generally deplored the film's iconoclastic tone and characterization of Rhodes, and in particular its depiction of him as a homosexual. Zimbabwean Peter Godwin, a journalist best known as the author of *Mukiwa,* a best-selling memoir of his youth in Rhodesia, was perhaps the leading critic of the series. In a London *Guardian* review cited widely throughout the Commonwealth and South African press, Godwin accused Thomas of removing Rhodes from his proper historical context, and in the process giving viewers "the very worst interpretation of the man." As an example of its bias, Godwin points to the series' portrayal of how Rhodes exploited King Lobengula:

> Before one dissolves into a sobbing heap at Lobengula's terrible fate at Rhodes's hands, for example, we should remember that Lobengula was a bloodthirsty tyrant himself, whose people had arrived as colonists themselves, only a generation before, wiping out most of the Mashona who lived there, and treating the rest as slaves.[25]

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Though they did not dispute Thomas' reconstruction of events—fo example, there is no question that Rhodes supported the 1894 Glen Gre act, which denied the franchise to black voters—several critics also objec ed to Thomas's portrayal of Rhodes as the "father of apartheid."[26]

With regards to the issue of Rhodes' sexuality, several critics insiste that the available evidence did not support the filmmakers' decision to por tray him as homosexual. Not surprisingly, this issue had not come up i British Gaumont's 1936 biopic.[27] However, Rhodes' relationships wi other men play a central role in Thomas' script. The 1996 film devotes great deal of attention to Rhodes' apparent infatuation with a series handsome young men who served as his personal secretaries. He is see developing a particularly close emotional attachment to Neville Pickering who lived for a time in Rhodes' home. The film reconstructs an incide showing Rhodes briefly abandoning his empire-building to nurse his com panion through a case of blood poisoning, and when Pickering dies, Rhod is shown behaving hysterically at the funeral. Though no scene explicit portrays Rhodes as a gay man, most reviewers agreed with Peter Godwi that "This portrayal of Rhodes as homosexual is quite categorical."[28] An yet, as producer Scott Meek pointed out, this outrage also reflects th inability of critics to cavil with the film's overall vision of the man:

> no one seemed appalled at all by the real elements of the Rhodes story: greed, murder, genocide, using drugs to subdue Zulu warlords, deceit, outright piracy, and warfare. All that seemed okay. But the sex stuff . . . it was as if the British media were saying, "We don't want to know this! Stop tampering with our heroes!" (Quill)

Like Viertel sixty years earlier, the critics compelled Thomas to defend h vision of Rhodes in public. He called Godwin's review "bizarre," an accused him and other critics of being "ignorant of the times and the ma (Quill).

The film drew warmer reactions abroad. In America, several newsp pers published glowing reviews.[29] Howard Rosenberg remarked that *Rho* proved once again that "the British are much better than the Americans telling their history through TV drama," reflecting perhaps the BBC tremendous cachet among American critics. Australian Public Televisio purchased the series expecting that its anti-British, anti-imperialist the would resonate with audiences (Quill), while in Zimbabwe the governme expressed its approval of the series by showing it on state-run television And yet, despite the support of the SABC for the project, and the victo of the ANC in the 1994 national elections, the series has yet to be sho

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

on television in South Africa, which Thomas attributes to the desire to avoid "opening old wounds" (personal communication).

The furor over the *Rhodes* series is only the most recent skirmish in a long-running battle over the legacy of one of the nineteenth century's most controversial figures. Nearly a century after his death, Rhodes remains a touchstone in the continuing reevaluation of Africa's colonial history. Indeed, it would be difficult to find another modern historical personality who could arouse comparable emotions. That the life story of Cecil Rhodes was only filmed twice, and then amid considerable controversy, is a testament to his extraordinary position at the center of an ongoing debate about the nature of European imperialism.

## NOTES

1. The ambivalence felt by modern Zimbabweans about Rhodes is reflected in a recent debate in that country over what to do with his remains, which are buried in the Matopos Hills of Matabeleland. While many Zimbabweans demand he be disinterred and deported, others prefer to leave him in peace (see Block).
2. Rhodes' legendary skills of manipulation stemmed in part from his willingness to express wildly contradictory opinions to different audiences. Thus, while he cheerfully shared such relatively enlightened sentiments with his more liberal associates, he was capable of making such egregious statements as "I prefer land to Niggers" when the situation demanded. For a description of Rhodes' talents of persuasion, see Antony Thomas' biography *Rhodes: The Race for Africa.*
3. Rhodes' vast territories in Central Africa were divided into two separate colonies: Northern and Southern Rhodesia, the modern nations of Zambia and Zimbabwe. In 1953, the two Rhodesias joined neighboring Nyasaland (modern Malawi) to form the Central African Federation. The federation was disbanded in 1963, and shortly thereafter Zambia and Malawi became independent. Southern Rhodesia then became "Rhodesia" until settler rule ended in 1980.
4. For the history of AFP and its relationship with the South African government, see Davis 128–33.
5. For the history of the Schlesinger project, see the National Archives of Zimbabwe (ZNA) A3/28/10–12 "Cinematograph," and particularly the communications of September 8, 1916, from Schlesinger to the General Manager, International Variety and Theatrical Agency, and of June 2, 1916, from the Private Secretary, Bulawayo, to Harold Shaw.
6. Unlike many of the later filmmakers who would approach the Rhodes story, Schlesinger seemed motivated by profit rather than by ideological commitment. The year after AFP canceled production of its Rhodes biopic, it produced *The Symbol of Sacrifice,* a film extolling the virtues of British rule in Southern Africa, while two decades later, AFP produced *De Voortrekkers,* which celebrated the heroic tradition of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Rhodes' most implacable enemies, the Boer farmers who founded the Afrikaner republics (Davis 128–37).

7. Details of the three late-1920s projects can be found in ZNA S1232 "Film Birth and Development in Rhodesia"; for Newton's response to the Woolf film, see in particular his December 23, 1929, communication to Leggate.
8. For a discussion of the popularity of the imperial epic in the thirties, see Richards, "Boys Own Empire." The 1939 Livingstone biopic was actually the second to reach the screen, an earlier silent version having appeared in 1925.
9. For details of the production of these films, see Gutsche 338–39.
10. For details on British Gaumont's dealings with the Southern Rhodesia government, see ZNA S482/240/39 "Films of Rhodesian Interest," and in particular the November 19, 1934, letter from Mr. Cornfield of Gaumont British to Sir Edward Harding, and the May 7, 1935, communication of A. D. Chataway, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, to the Secretary for the Treasury.
11. Gough-Yates examines Viertel's frustrating tenure at British Gaumont, and his relationship with Michael Balcon.
12. But she also suggests, rather enigmatically, that the scene "had to be discarded owing to the difficulty of making clear its meaning in English" (134). Michael Balcon also felt compelled to comment on the excision of the indaba scene. Confirming that "not only was the scene in the original script but it was actually shot," he declared that "We did not make this decision to omit the Indabe incident from the film without deep and prolonged consideration"—though he failed to explain precisely why the decision had been made (Gough-Yates 215).
13. For a discussion of the press criticism in South Africa, see Gutsche 338–39.
14. For reaction to the film in Southern Rhodesia, see ZNA S482/240/39 "Films of Rhodesian Interest," and in particular Jarvis's March 1, 1936, communication to Godfrey Huggins, in which he also remarked that "you and I know that Rhodes never saw Loben in his life."
15. Gough-Yates describes the "extravagant praise" the film received in America (214).
16. For the history of Gaumont's attempt to crack the American market, see Sedgwick.
17. See ZNA S482/240/39 "Films of Rhodesian Interest," and specifically the communication of March 30, 1938, from the Office of the High Commissioner to Godfrey Huggins.
18. ZNA S482/240/39 "Films of Rhodesian Interest" also contains the reactions to the O'Keefe script. See in particular Roger Bray to Lanigan O'Keefe, February 5, 1945; and Information Officer W. D. Gale to the Secretary, Department of Native Affairs, February 27, 1945.
19. For the influence of the South African Government on motion picture production, see Tomaselli.
20. The Southern Rhodesian Government considered several proposals for a film about Livingstone during the late 1940s and 1950s. See for example ZNA S926/F56 1947–1952, for a December 17, 1948, proposal by Harry Franklin, Information

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Officer for the Northern Rhodesian Government, to Brian Usher, Central African Film Unit.

21. Apartheid bashing at the movies actually commenced with David Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982), which showed its protagonist confronting racism in South Africa.
22. Thomas told me that budgetary constraints kept the crew from filming in Zimbabwe (personal communication).
23. According to Thomas, he had never seen the earlier film, and was only vaguely aware of its existence (personal communication).
24. Thomas told me that the Zimbabwean government passed the script along to a prominent academic, Stanlake Samkange, who found nothing objectionable in it. Thomas, however, made it clear to both the South African government and the ANC that he had no intention of changing the script, and neither organization asked him to do so (personal communication).
25. Godwin's review appeared in the *Guardian* on September 12, 1996; I am citing the version which appeared in the September 27, 1996, Johannesburg *Weekly Mail & Guardian*.
26. See for example the *Calgary Herald*'s review of November 2, 1996.
27. *Rhodes of Africa* contains a brief scene in which a young woman interviews Rhodes about his plans for the "natives" in newly conquered Matabeleland. This character, inspired by the South African poet Olive Schreiner, is clearly attracted to Rhodes, who seems equally drawn to her. But nothing comes of their relationship, and she is used largely as a device to allow Rhodes to announce his intention to "civilize" and educate his new subjects because he sees the "natives" as "exactly like children."
28. Public discussion of the series' homoerotic theme took on a Rashomon-esque character. While critics like Godwin believed the film left nothing to the viewer's imagination, Thomas maintained that his script left the question ambiguous. Likewise, when *Masterpiece Theater* host Russell Baker introduced the program to U.S. viewers, he described the relationship between Pickering and Rhodes as a "puzzle," inspiring *Los Angeles Times* reviewer Howard Rosenberg to insist "Thomas did not write it as a puzzle." In a negative review of the series in the *Sunday Telegraph*, historian Geoffrey Wheatcroft opined that Rhodes "was more than possibly homosexual in temperament, and that he more than probably never gave that temperament physical expression" (September 8, 1996), a view that accords with Thomas' interpretation. In his biography of Rhodes, Thomas offers a nuanced discussion of the prevailing sexual mores of the late-Victorian world. The contrast between biography and screenplay on this subject highlights the inability of the biopic as a genre to deal effectively with this kind of historical ambiguity or lacunae.
29. For examples of American reaction, see Howard Rosenberg's enthusiastic review in the *Los Angeles Times*, and Walter Goodman's review in the *New York Times*.
30. According to press reports, the series did very well in the international market and ultimately recouped its cost.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## WORKS CITED


Barkas, Natalie. *Thirty Thousand Miles for the Films: The Story of the Filming of "Soldiers Three" and "Rhodes of Africa."* London: Blackie and Sons, 1939.

Block, Robert. "Now in Bad Odor in Zimbabwe, Rhodes Isn't Safe in His Grave." *Wall Street Journal,* Dec. 9, 1998: 1, 6.

Davis, Peter. *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa.* Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996.

Dening, Penelope. "On the Rhodes to God Knows Where." *Irish Times,* Sept. 14, 1996.

Feuchtwanger, Antonia. Rev. of *Rhodes. The Independent,* Dec. 17, 1995.

Godwin, Peter. Rev. of *Rhodes. Weekly Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), Sept. 27, 1996.

Goodman, Walter. "A Magnate As Hard As a Diamond." *New York Times,* Jan. 2, 1998: E34.

Gough-Yates, Kevin. "Berthold Viertel at Gaumont-British." *The Unknown Thirties: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929–1939.* Ed. Jeffrey Richards. London: I. B. Taurus, 1998. 209–36.

Gutsche, Thelma. *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895–1940.* Capetown: Timmons, 1972.

Quill, Greg. "Rhodes: The Last Emperor." *Toronto Star,* Nov. 2, 1996.

Richards, Jeffrey. "Boys Own Empire: Feature Films and Imperialism in the 1930s." *Imperialism and Popular Culture.* Ed. John M. Mackenzie. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986.

_____. *Visions of Yesterday.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973.

Rosenberg, Howard. "Profile of an Imperialist." *Los Angeles Times,* Jan. 2, 1998: F1, F24.

Sedgwick, John. "Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market, 1934–1936." *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 16.3 (1996): 333–48.

Thomas, Antony. Personal communication. Oct. 21, 1999.

_____. *Rhodes: The Race for Africa.* London: BBC Books, 1966.

Tomaselli, Kenyan. *The Cinema of Apartheid.* New York: Smyrna/Lakeview, 1988.

Wheatcroft, Geoffrey. Rev. of *Rhodes. Sunday Telegraph,* Sept. 8, 1996.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# THE MECHANICAL LIFE IN THE AGE OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION: AMERICAN BIOPICS, 1961–1980

GEORGE F. CUSTEN

## A SIGN OF THE TIMES

Despite the elegant but grammatically incorrect slogan Howard Dietz devised for MGM ("Ars Gratia Artis"), Southern California was the land of Mayer, not Pater. Hollywood's wise men read people, rather than books, and they thus knew that art never existed for its own sake. What was the point? And if somehow a film managed against all odds to have a long existence, this was counterbalanced by the undeniable fact that in Hollywood, most careers were short. Most attenuated of all was collective memory.

Take that famous symbol of Hollywood, the sign atop Mount Lee. It was erected in 1923 to promote "Hollywoodland," a real estate venture. After the war, the area's cachet faded, and people forgot who had erected it—and why. But as Nabokov realized, memory can "speak" to us in many evocations, can employ many voices and forms, so in the crepuscular postwar years of Hollywood's empire, the elongated shadows cast by the oversized, fifty foot letters spelled out, in equal scale, fantasies and projections held by the people below—dreams, in fact, that had been fostered by the movies. The sign, for all its tackiness, asserted a kind of truth about American culture: it publicly declared the omnipotence of movie life. Here was the omnipresent vision of life-as-constructed-by-Hollywood, a world above other imaginary worlds. It had shaped our conceptions of the self, defined both history and greatness. Above all, it had colonized our imaginations. After all those nights spent in the thrall of those patterned distortions, the movies have taught us, Neal Gabler observed, an important lesson: "how to escape from life into life" (6).

Biography 23.1 (Winter 2000) © Biographical Research Center

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

This essay is about one particular escape route. It charts an imaginary journey moviegoers in the post-studio years 1961–1980 might have taken: that which led them to visit the world of the Hollywood film biography, or biopic. The films based on the lives of actual people—or even an occasional non-human like the race horse Seabiscuit—might be either prestige productions like MGM's *Marie Antoinette* (1938) or *Madame Curie* (1943), or one of those sausages ground out and put on the shelf for quick consumption, like the biopic of Eva Tanguay, *The I Don't Care Girl* (1952). The biopic's forms, and the roster of luminaries impersonating other luminaries, were, like the destiny of all Hollywood films, tied directly to the nature and health of the studio system, an enterprise whose products reflected the visions and goals (and insecurities and vendettas) of the men who orchestrated its policy, its executives. "Movies," observed Hortense Powdermaker, one of the few anthropologists to look closely at the culture of moviemakers, "are made by many people" (3). And while Margaret Mead believed that as the result of group effort Hollywood's products were more representative of the patterns of its host culture than say the work of a single author, having studied the "tribe" of Hollywood chieftains up close for a year, Powdermaker was clearheaded enough to reach a conclusion at odds with her mentor's.[1] Powdermaker was certain that though movies were "big industry," this did not reduce the bulk of the "cast" of players to the role of faceless bureaucrat or factory worker. Within this world, the dictates of the "dream factory" most often bowed to the demands of industry *realpolitik*, and "certain individuals have power to strongly influence them, while others are relatively powerless" (3).

When in 1956 one of those with this power, Darryl F. Zanuck, departed Twentieth Century-Fox, the studio he founded and ran for twenty-one years, it was because the way of making movies Powdermaker had studied had changed. It was, he noted, no longer fun. While his public utterances declared faith in Hollywood's ability to survive, privately he told confidantes like writer/director Philip Dunne that he doubted that it would. In any event, he was fed up with the producer's changed role in the Hollywood which was evolving. Not only would things not get better, but he was certain that "It's going to get worse. In a very short time, the business will be completely dominated by the stars and their agents. Last week, in this office, a goddam agent started to tell me how a script should be rewritten. I kicked the bastard out, but next week he, or another like him, will be back" (Dunne 277).

Underneath his fury, Zanuck must have recognized that the thing which so enraged him was that when staring the agent down, he was looking in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the mirror. Before him stood a man with the same quality that others had once seen in Zanuck: the figure who wants to refract the story through the prism of his life. While Zanuck managed to replicate his life manqué so it was legible in the values of countless biopics, he could not bear to confront it in person. What Zanuck was really lamenting was that changed circumstances had impeded his ability to stamp his signature on America. He no longer had an easy run controlling and defining the studio program. Stars had ceased to be chess pieces to be moved at his will, and other creative personnel were no longer tied to a single place through long-term contracts, making it harder to keep talented teams of craftspeople together. With these altered circumstances, with a new series of impediments, the vision of Fox could no longer be thought up, orchestrated, or manipulated by a single figure. The diminution of producer Zanuck's power was reflected in changing extrapolations of greatness onto lives and worlds, onto templates other than the producer's. But if it was easy to gauge the impact of change on individual careers, comprehending different parts of Fitzgerald's "whole equation of pictures" is more problematic. What impact would a change in Hollywood's model of organization and power have on how it depicted these same things, these changes in power writ large, for other eras, spheres, for the rest of the world outside the studio walls?

This is hardly a speculative way to frame either this time or these issues. For until the 1950s, no one would argue with a formulation asserting that "in Hollywood . . . the man who sits in the front office sets the tone of the whole studio, influencing and shaping attitudes and behavior of everyone in it; even more important, he leaves his stamp on the movie" (Powdermaker 100). Movies reflected the worldviews of the men who determined and orchestrated the overall policies of the system, and it was their judgment which determined and shaped which films got made (or didn't). It was this culture and this will to organizational power that gave the American cinematic world one shape rather than another. But what would this celluloid version of a great life be after the careers, lives, and organization of Hollywood's great and powerful figures who molded the movies—the producers—had themselves changed? How did changing times and the shifting sands of power affect the producers, and in turn shape Hollywood's ability to present history as they saw it? Would the same types of lives which had in the past been selected now be chosen as biographical subjects? How would a fork in the road of Hollywood's history, and the divergence in a life such as Zanuck's, translate on the screen? How would Zanuck's own career options shape all those biopics made up of choices and paths, of great men and women of history following one way or not taking another?

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The answer can be found both by charting the changes in the culture of Hollywood, and through the presentation and analysis of the overall contours of the corpus of biopics made in this time in the two decades of the 1960s and 1970s.[2]

In *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History,* I asserted that "[a] system of film production and distribution once upon a time created an environment in which film biographies were a common feature" (2). Based on an analysis of biopics made in the period 1927–1960, the statement is still accurate enough today. Of course, biopics have been made since 1960. But there are fewer of them, and they are not necessarily about the same kinds of figures "classical" Hollywood nominated for cinematic eminence. Further, though the film corporations still found the genre useful in the two decades after the studio system had ended, the studios were not necessarily the main venue producing and sheltering these lives from which Americans derived their notions of history. (This function was now largely television's preserve.) These changes suggest that while Clio is alive and well, and still maintains a well-appointed residence in Hollywood, her life after 1960 was so altered that the biographical films of this period deserve a study of their own. Have the patterns of cinematic culture, once so clear and strong, been maintained? Or, like many other forces in our symbolic environment, have they been modified, hybridized beyond a recognizable morphology, or eliminated altogether in the post-studio world?

At the time I did earlier research into the studio era biopic, I was convinced that though the 1950s was the decade with the highest number of biopics—107—the genre's high-water mark, its most creative and powerful moment as a cultural form, came during the very different times of the 1930s. Films like *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *Juarez* (1939), and *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) affirmed to most (though not to every part) of this nation desperate to believe Hollywood's version of our history that greatness was still America's destiny, and that as a people and a country, our leaders were such that they could yet arrange a rendezvous with such forces. Biopics continued to be made after the thirties. But their fate—one of gentle decline and diminution of status—seemed to mirror that of the studio system. After 1960, altered attitudes towards fame in the culture outside Hollywood, and changes in Hollywood's organization and personnel, meant that in the new Hollywood, biopics did not seem to carry the same weight, nor perform the same cultural work, they had formerly done. We had become, as critic David Denby observed, a culture whose people no longer believed in the very concept which I believe underscored Hollywood's concept of biography.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

We no longer believed in greatness. While some insisted that heroism and its accompanying rhetoric was eternal, to many others, the world was constructed anew so it was a place devoid of any mystique. Americans now lived in a time in which these illusions had been stripped bare by historical forces which undermined people's faith in individual leaders and the institutions they headed. The very ideas once taken to be quasi-sacred now seemed pedestrian and old-fashioned. By 1960, that which had formerly filled us with admiration called up a very different emotion: "it embarrasse[d] us" (35, qtd. in Custen 232). With rare exceptions like *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) or *Gandhi* (1982), the genre which once grandly proclaimed that we cherish a few select men now appeared to have "faded away to a minor form."

I have since concluded that this judgment, expressed in 1992, is incomplete. This essay looks at the biopic's characteristic profile in the two decades after the studio era, and reconsiders the question of whether it continued to be thought of—by its producers and audiences—as an influential cultural form, or whether in a culture in which so many institutions had changed, and in which values and priorities had shifted, it was held to have fulfilled some other possibility. While all the things I have mentioned—stars, genres, mode of production, corporate and regional as well as group culture—have been important in assembling a natural history of a single biopic, marshaling these idiosyncratic elements into groupings suggests that broadly conceived, two sets of forces intersecting or colliding at the sites of the biopic can be thought of as largely determining its fate in this period: the rise of television, and the significant alterations in the culture of Hollywood, which partly resulted from this rise. First, television was the first medium to actively—and successfully—challenge Hollywood's charter as the shaper of public history. Unlike previous Hollywood strategies for dealing with rival media and media institutions, the architects of Hollywood's policies tried, but were not able, to coopt the new form. Because television's capacities and conditions of production, and the contexts of its reception, were so at odds with how the cinema figured these things, tv's notion of biography and fame had not simply challenged Hollywood's version: it subverted and redefined these previously established conventions. One of the most startling changes occurred in 1964, the date which marked the debut of made-for-television films. Hereafter, even Hollywood's formerly uncontested role—that of purveyor of films disseminated via television—was undermined. Thus, while Hollywood made fewer and fewer biopics after 1960, the genre survived because, in large part, production migrated away from theatres and to tv. Here both fame and the famous were markedly different from the studio era versions.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Second, if television as a medium can be thought of as one set of forces pressing a particular set of imperatives on the biopic, the institutional power structure of Hollywood is equally important as a factor in shaping the form. Hollywood's concept of "the great life" was integrally tied in with its producers' notions of what this term meant. It was largely their authority, secured through power, which operationalized the way greatness was represented on film. What figures should be selected as subjects? What qualities would explain their character and career? It is not surprising that during the studio era, the laundry list of personality traits and social attributes used to construct and explain these famous lives were in large part congruent with those qualities that marked a successful producer. As the producer's power faded, and a different set of executives with different backgrounds—often former agents—came to enjoy the same leverage formerly enjoyed by some producers, it seems reasonable to ask if the new executives' notions of fame would sustain the established traditions, or change them. So in a sense, if the 60s and 70s are broadly characterized as the post-studio years of alterity, this essay must be about how change came to a genre which had always assured us that the world was in fact largely unchanging and stable.

The studio era films were based on a model of history which insisted that change occurred not because inequalities or unresolved social or economic unrest created tensions, but rather because uniquely gifted individuals, distributed through our history and certain strata of our population, were able to see into the future and give us innovative and improved ways to live. In the studio era biopic's world, history's causes were clearly explainable, and just as clearly shown. Those in power, and those who possessed authority, accepted change, in the "good" part of the world at least, because (clearly shown) decisions to stay pat or innovate were arrived at through democratic consensus, fueled by the common good. Ultimately, Hollywood's version of history showed that no choice was made without the support of the ultimate arbiter: the great common sense of "the people." Brokered through open and democratic debate, these leaders and their innovations and achievements were thus "shown" to have evolved towards the natural shapes and values for their times. Most importantly, these films suggested that change occurs through the agency of individual intervention, through strong leaders. The rest of us, who were not on the same level with these exalted beings but who knew them as wives, brothers, and neighbors, could only admire or oppose them, follow their commands, be their audience and community. If such assumptions were welcomed by the mass audiences during the studio era—and the genre's popularity suggested that to some

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

extent they were—it might be expected that several decades later, in an environment where the studio system which had put these audiences in place existed only as a trace within a larger entertainment structure, the biopics now on the screen might be out of sync with people's desires, uses, and gratifications. Universal City the studio was now Universal City the tour. What would happen to all those famous people who had "lived" there, what difference would it make for the lives emanating from this and other studio centers?

## THE BIOPIC, THE STUDIO SYSTEM, AND TELEVISION

Before things got messy after the war, Hollywood was secure about its cultural authority in the republic of entertainment. But in 1946, a new rival, whose unknown potential was held in abeyance during the war by an FCC ruling, came out fighting. Its ascendance by the end of the 1950s marked the end of Hollywood's time as the unchallenged purveyor of public history. One of the big screen's most powerful functions—that along with other mediated and interpersonal sources of influence, it cultivated people's notions of history—had been gerrymandered by the small.

What concerns us here are the changes all this wrought in one province—fame—and how such changes redrew one part of the post-studio map, that of the biopic. Though movies and television both used sound and images to tell stories, the total conditions in which the two media were produced and received, and the size and scale of their basic "units," seemed so different that versions of lives originating in one forum rather than the other seemed destined to construct disparate views of life. This was particularly true during tv's earliest days, when its black-and-white only shows, originating from small studios, seemed so cramped and cheap compared to the famous "production values" out of which emerged the spectacles of biopicland. With their enormous screens, before which we sat in the dark, necks craned upward, the movies inspired awe. Soon after the excitement of early contact and diffusion, television inspired nothing so much as a kind of docile—and dull—familiarity. Though in its earliest days, tv imitated the subject matter of film by showing truncated versions of Hollywood's "great man" biopics, through the growing field of its own intertextual potential, it was laying the groundwork for supertexts whose vision was as true to their material conditions of production and reception as Hollywood films had been tailored by their own distinctive ecology.

If Hollywood biopics were infused with and suffused by the remnants of other genres—melodramas, westerns, musicals, science fiction—tv biography soon had its own traditions of deep structure: the talk show and the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

audience participation show. Rather than seeing history from afar as film did—often signaled by its opening establishing (long) shot or by maps of the world—tv shows offered us lessons by seeming to talk at the viewer, by making the viewer feel personally connected to history in an intimate but startlingly casual way: "You are there." Unlike much of Hollywood's escapist fare, tv also had shows which seemed designed to let spectators revel in the lowest or most deviant forms of human behavior.

Sometimes tv-land featured the person-you-would-not-want-to-be (and but for the grace of God and the accident of good genes you weren't.) Residents of a modern day Court of Miracles, these unfortunates would become "Queen for a Day." Game shows often gave us humanity at its most pathetic. Viewers witnessed the spectacle of others' chagrin and humiliation at loss. Served up to spectators by an emcee or "host" who simultaneously whipped audience emotion into a frenzy while eliciting poignant tales of pathos from contestants, audiences at the shows and those watching at home ate up these mild transgressions, and then went happily about their business—content, as Theodor Adorno and Nathanael West might both note, that for once at least they would not be the victims, the role for which mass culture had fully prepared them. Such shows—whose weeping and shrieking denizens I vividly recall from my childhood memories of tv watching—had a rawness and directness which, unpolished as it appeared, was a fascinating contrast to the bell jar world of Hollywood human relations. Such real-life mini-dramas did not simply lay the groundwork for tabloid shows of later years; in their own time they cultivated a different set of values in the audience, and shaped an alternative template for depicting historical figures. They prepared us for the world of revisionist pathography that would characterize all biographical musings in a post-Watergate world.

No wonder that these differences—in audience, in the contexts of reception, in the material quality of the environment in which they were viewed, in how their star personnel were talked about—were also reflected in the distinctive versions of what these two media told us constituted the components of a great life. The criteria definitely changed. In a time of diminished expectation and decreased attention, in an era when watching did not mean going out to a theater designed more like a temple or shrine, but rather slouching on the couch like a common vegetable watching a small box plunked down in a home where you "received" your history amidst the dull fare and pressing cares of real life which went on around the living room screen, would not the grandiosity and magnitude of cinematic fame and biography seem . . . intimidating, grating, even foolish? And

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

wouldn't such a response from the tv viewer be unthinkable, perhaps even prohibited in the cinema? Or to put it even more bluntly, was the main criterion for a film biography—greatness—required at all on tv, a medium modeled in almost every way on an aesthetic of the casual? Although the causes of change in Hollywood, and the diminution of its audience, are many, the two factors we have discussed so far—the changing culture of Hollywood and the changes wrought by tv—undeniably had a powerful effect on how Americans came to see the form of biography they were most accustomed to—a narrative told through a series of moving images with sound.

## FILM LIVES AND VIEWERS' LIVES

If Hollywood took most of its biopics from generally literate short stories that appeared in serious or at least bourgeois publications, television seemed to draw its biographical inspiration from the headlines and from the reading material the overall population favored. Television found its Pliny by raiding the Seven-Eleven for the tabloid papers, or by watching its own tabloid talk shows. It is therefore a rather large leap backwards from these sources, and the resulting made-for-tv biopics, to the fonts of studio era biopics, book-length monographs and biographical films which provided the sources and standards for earlier film biographies. Siegfried Kracauer has argued that the creators of print biographies from whom the leading biopic producers drew some of their materials had a relatively easy task. While writers in other literary forms were forced to search for a plot, Kracauer declares that "every historical figure contains its own form." All the biographer had to do was uncover it and the rest would follow. This assessment, that the mediation of every life was orderly and predictable and *knowable,* makes a great deal of sense given the chaos of life in Kracauer's Weimar Germany, a mood reflected more in that culture's fiction than in its biographies. Similar to the work print biographies performed in the very different United States, in Germany at this time, biographers' notions of how to organize a life created the illusion of stability. In fact, "the moral of the biography is that, in the chaos of current artistic practices, it is the only seemingly necessary prose form." Necessary or superfluous to the larger culture outside Hollywood of the studio era, the forms taken by the cinematic biography had to be hammered out of a template of the possible, set up by the corporate culture's mode of organizing production. Certain aspects of this culture powerfully shaped what was possible in a biopic—its limited running time, the censoring of certain historic realities, the determinants of star casting—so that making a film version of a life was a fight against

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

adversity formed by what came to be seen as limitations rather than as a set of aesthetic conventions. Confronted with the challenge of a two-hour running time, Hollywood biopic producers struggled to find inventive ways to compress an entire life, while still accurately evoking its spirit. As a result, the producer, like the biographer, gave up the possibility of invention by relying on highly conventionalized strategies in his biopics. The rationale was that by doing this, like the print author, he somehow gained the representative power of "an authenticated fate" (103).

The ensuing tension between pacifying the public with a calmative of history, yet at the same time making the narrative entertaining and exciting, destabilized the film biography. It also meant that no one—neither scholar nor impresario—was satisfied with the resulting films, for they inevitably showed traces of this structural conflict between loyalty to Clio and reliance on cliche. As a result, some of the studio system's most surreal products were its historical films and biographies of "great" figures. And yet, from William Bendix's grotesque portrayal of Babe Ruth, to Bette Davis's madly beatific Carlotta, whether or not it was history we were watching up on the screen, it was rarely dull. Like the other Frankfurters who wrote passionately and perceptively about the soul of man under mass culture, Kracauer maintained that same pose of disinterest when it came to looking closely at how the particular components of "mass production" worked for film. For him, it was enough to note that under this system the stories were more like consumer items than works of art. But had Kracauer looked more closely, had he flirted for a moment with a different kind of positivism than the Frankfurt brand, he would have noted that the film's industrial base, far more than the "organic" shape of a life, determined what the narrative would look like.

Here was our world—but inflected through the star persona, constrained by fear of litigation, more closely related to other films and movie stars than to the worlds or persons they chronicled, produced by men to confirm a view of history that glorified entertainment and justified Hollywood. Here neatly wrapped up in various standardized two-hour "Stories of . . .," or "The Life of . . .," were the lives of the men and women who had shaped this world. In fact, so mechanical were the "constructions" of biography on the screen, that the impersonations of various great figures by "Mr. George Arliss," one of the "biopic's" most characteristic stars, were hard to tell apart. So alike in gesture, voice, and tone were they, that only wigs, costumes, and the occasional difference in wife and children enabled one to distinguish the dream factory's version of the life of Disraeli from that of Alexander Hamilton, Voltaire, or the Duke of Wellington. Had

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Oscar Wilde, the subject of at least three film biopics himself, lived longer than his tragically foreshortened forty-five years, he might have amended his observation that it is Judas who always got to write the biography. Today, that credit would most likely go to the film producer.

The Hollywood biopic brand of history is constructed almost exclusively around a single concept: fame. But as Leo Braudy has pointed out, fame is a set of potential relations among individuals and their worlds—a person who does something which is recorded and then disseminated to audiences—rather than a set of standard practices or stable intrinsic qualities. Any shift in the weight or priority accorded to one of these elements that make up the "fame relationship"—and especially the means of mediation, and the means by which this is controlled—will dramatically alter the nature of the film biography product. Once deemed a method for validating and rationalizing class distinctions, the opening up of audiences by new communications technologies broadened and changed the category of fame itself. When placed within the democratic environment of the United States, fame became less a class-bound phenomenon, and more "the personal possession of any worthy individual . . . a compromise between an aristocracy of the personally distinguished and an egalitarian democracy in which all are deserving" (Gamson 18). In America, then, the famous person—almost always male—was a kind of oxymoronic figure. He had to be "unprecedented without being unrecognizable." That is, he had to demonstrate that some attribute placed him on the far reaches of the bell curve in a given area of his existence without making the day-to-day rest of him—his needs, tastes, and values—any different from you or me (Braudy 393–400).

But if debates about history's truth status are never resolved, leaving contemporary writers mired in accusations of essentialism or counterclaims of relativism, Hollywood's strategic claim—that these biopics "possess" the truth—and its deployment in a variety of discourses about both film and biography, is something amenable to analysis. Many sources tell us that until quite recently "a primary characteristic" of Americans is that we have a poor attitude towards history. Former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney suggested it is best characterized as a "refusal to remember" (5, qtd. in Rosenzweig and Thelen 3). This is a polite way of saying Americans are both ignorant about our past, and either unconcerned or perhaps even happy to live in this state. If Cheney is correct, this attitude stems in part from people's perception that "official" or academic history, increasingly professionalized and cut off in its language from daily forms of discourse, is quite simply hard to fathom. It is dull.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

A recent national survey of almost 1,500 Americans affirmed a variation of this truth: that most Americans "feel unconnected to the past in history classrooms because they don't recognize themselves in the version of the past presented there" (Rosenzweig and Thelen 12). Americans are telling us the history learned at school is "dull and irrelevant." But if Hollywood is guilty of contributing its own share of dullness and irrelevancy to our national pool, there are areas where historians fail, but intrepid Hollywood excels. Hollywood knows how to make people "feel connected." This is done largely through advertising, of course, but advertising must sell something, and that something used to be Hollywood's genres and stars. But genres change, and stars age. Getting and staying "connected" is in fact at the heart of Hollywood's game. The person who best understood this, or rather who understood this *and* was willing to put aside distaste and put it into practice without shame, was Cecil B. De Mille. More showman than *auteur,* De Mille's frames were virtual department store displays of material consumer goods. He took what Griffith and others had done in the historical epic and brought it into the age of sex and advertising.

All in the same year, 1923, Irving Thalberg left Universal to work for Louis B. Mayer, Ernst Lubitsch came to America, Hollywood celebrated its own fame by erecting that great sign atop a peak in the Cahuenga Mountains, and De Mille filmed a life into which Hollywood could really sink its teeth, the story of Moses. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments* cleaned up at the box office, and the savvy showman's saga set the standard for how the religious life on film would look. De Mille framed the Bible as a spectacle of conspicuous display that somehow managed to mix piety with pulchritude. His spectacular track record with this biopic suggested that this mixture—the conservative or traditional homage to religion and family values combined with the safely prurient—was the key to success in capturing a "centrally produced" national audience, and thereby in forging the makings of a foundation of a national culture. Although sophisticated marketing research techniques which would come to characterize the campaign "against" the unsuspecting moviegoer were not widely used in the film industry until after World War II, movie executives spent a good deal of time imagining the "values" of the average viewer, who was in fact a figure unknown, yet clearly pictured in their minds as female more likely than male, as middle class, white, and Christian.

Finding a way to connect any life on film to that cobbling together of regional audiences which made up the fiction of the national audience, of linking the culture of Hollywood with the culture of America and its moviegoers, has always been the Hollywood equivalent of finding the Holy

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Grail. The quest is most vexing or revealing when film people try to match up an ideal and normative form of screen life with the audience's purported normative values. Though this union has been known to occur on both a large scale—De Mille—and in many smaller genres—teenpics, for example—it is in the biopics, those films which purport to hold up as exemplary the lives of actual people, that this match of opposites in search of the truth is put to its most stringent test. While selling any view of life constructed in a Hollywood film is always a crap shoot, those films which push "history" and real lives have in a sense been held up as the gauge or standard all others are thought to imitate. (If this is true, it gives these films great status as totemic "first principle" objects embedded in America's great media influence debate. In Hollywood, films resemble other films far more than they do the lives outside the frame upon which they are supposed to be based.) Unlike the fictive discourse out of which the rest of Hollywood's canon is acknowledged to have been fabricated, biopics' putative connection to accuracy and truth makes them unique. At the outset, each member of the category is defined as being a true story. This assertion (rather than implication) of the truth status of the stories that follow this claim—asserted in their introductory titles, in their research credits, in their myriad controlled and spontaneous publicity discourses and materials—suggests perhaps a more powerful type of invention yet. It suggests that while these films are true, all other films are invented fictions—an assertion which is of course itself a Hollywood fiction.

## CHANGING LIVES AND SHIFTING FAME IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: PLINY, PULCHRITUDE, AND PIETY

The way Hollywood pictured the lives of the famous on screen was intimately tied to the way Hollywood personnel lived their own lives, and the way the community leaders of the Hollywood culture developed and mutated the values which informed their work, defined power and authority within their industry, and delineated the social codes of the cinema. Hollywood the place was first settled in 1887. Barely older than the movies, its principal identity was carried by the discourses surrounding the movies, and the common coin of exchange in both industry and town was hyperbole, or as "Hooray for Hollywood," a song whose exuberance could be read equally as praise or subversion of these values, proclaimed, Hollywood is a place where "they say you're great when you are only good."

The world of Hollywood films embodies many conundrums. One of the biggest tells us that while the continuing success of the American film industry is based on its adaptability to the changing apparatuses found in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the ecologies of its leisure culture, its main method of survival has been its reputed ability to be in sync with the values and desires of "ordinary" people. Yet, its film and its social world have created a real universe of life and work that is based on inverted status and values. The image was valued over its material substance, the uneducated producer over the college educated writer, the West over the East. As the nation's social laboratory of the imagination, Hollywood was powerful even without trafficking in some tangible physical commodity which people yearned to possess. Its products, the movies' dreams, were not objects bartered like other lures. These dreams included our sense of history, and in fact a large part of our vision of American culture itself. The values and the conditions which nurtured Hollywood movies—the mass idols, the culture of consumption, the image—were living confirmation of Frankfurt theorist Leo Lowenthal's observation that the movies' greatest value might be that as the most potent extension of mass culture, they ultimately would be the force that caused America's values to shift radically from what they had been in the first decades of the Twentieth century, in the age of print and the reader, to something very different in the age of the moving image and the movie lover.

The American cinema's appeal and the movies' widespread diffusion also made Hollywood the new capital city of this redefined United States. Aside from films, the town's main product was glamour, and glamour, as John Berger tells us, is a proposition based not on this country's core beliefs, democracy and equality—which the movies claimed to sell—but instead was based on another quality predicated on the unequal distribution of so many things—on social envy (131). This was very clear to Nathanael West, whose grotesques did not come West to secure a dream, but to end theirs, to die. While waiting for this to happen, they can't wait for the next funeral or disaster to befall some other soul, hopefully one richer and more famous than they. Movie going has made them spectators at their own lives, and eventually their own funerals, too. This tension between equality and glamour is apparent in the biopic, for the glamour served up by biographies of these new idols, the movie stars, was a double-edged sword whose sharp surfaces could with equal likelihood help the worshiped icons forge ahead, or prove to be the weapon upon which they would be pushed or impale themselves once fallen from public favor. In the biopic, the insecurity of the star's "real life" story was grafted onto those other life narratives of the biopic elite, stories which suggested that history equalled stability and security. Ironically, then, Hollywood's insubstantial and ever changing roster of film icons helped create the opposite impression: that things and folks were not transient, but permanently good.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Poking fun at the biopic's aesthetic pretensions and scholarly shortcomings, or expressing contempt or disbelief at the relentless teleology that drove this genre, missed the important work the films actually did. They were agents of socialization. While the rest of Hollywood's scripts over the long run impressed audiences through what social scientists of the day called "the sleeper effect," or more immediately offered up what Herbert Blumer's research called incidental learning[3]—inspirations, tips on social etiquette, frustrations, or as Nathanael West's Faye Greener showed, bathos fueled by a grotesque shortage of imagination—biopics were assumed to be capable of actually teaching something that citizens of a young nation with an insecure identity would cherish. They would show us history.

It was of course a brand of history *cum* biography of the nineteenth century kind, the type of "official" biography Lytton Strachey once maliciously referred to as "those two fat volumes," whose uplifting narratives and muscular Christianity underscored non-believer Strachey's belief that given the censorship that inevitably comes along with the commission to be an official biographer, "it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one" (7). Yet, when discussing Hollywood's and biography's familiarity with falsity, we must take into account this truth: that what little sense of history people did have probably came from the movies.

## THE 1960S AND AFTER: TWO LADIES SING, BUT IS IT THE BLUES?

Though the number of film biopics made in the 1950s equals the total made during the 1960s and 1970s combined, this progressive numeric decline is relatively meaningless without taking into account other components. What subjects form this corpus? What explanatory models of fame inform the films? What cultural work do their producers see these films doing, and are these films received in the same spirit by their audiences? The genre itself had changed fundamentally in several key areas, including the historical era represented, the film's setting, the national origin of its biographical subjects, and their careers or professions. Comparing the thirty-six biopics made in the period 1971–1980 to the sixty-nine made in the previous decade—or to the 107 made in the 1950s—both the number and its constitutive profile give one a sense of a diminution of both an industry and a genre.

Rather than allowing us to see clearly those mainstream understandings we purportedly hold about our world, these data suggest that far more frequently film in its emphases and omissions displays the shape of authority, and nowhere more obviously than in the demographics of the figures, locales, and historic settings found in the biopics. Yet, as I will demonstrate,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

even when framing an era turbulent and rife with struggle, in its biopics Hollywood still tried to argue that little had changed, and when change had to be acknowledged, it was for purposes of holding audiences. Thus, biopics whose surface affinities might suggest patterns of continuity may reveal upon closer consideration those different directions taken by the genre during the uncertainties of the post-studio era.

As the debut films for Barbra Streisand and Diana Ross, figures already important in other media and entertainment fields, *Funny Girl* (1968) and *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) are both star vehicles for female entertainers. But there were significant differences. One film looks backward to a culture dominated by Tin Pan Alley and white musicians, the other backward to black blues and ahead to an entertainment culture in which black artists would see their vision refracted far less through the dominance and opposition of the institutions of white culture. In fact, the rise to prominence of black artists and enterprises (like Motown) signaled a shift in the flow of influence, a realigning of the cultural staging area which altered national popular culture. The unobtrusive directional track—the structures and harmonies of blues and soul—took center stage in content as well. Other qualities of the two films suggest further difference. The directors—William Wyler at the end of his distinguished career, and Sidney J. Furie at the opening of his less distinguished one—brought different star treatment and production values to their recreations of a world and a life. The motivations for making the films also differ. The Fanny Brice film contained all the elements of the "Old Hollywood" biopic: major director, pre-tested hit show, young star on the rise. (Brice's own Hollywood film career never equalled the stardom she attained in vaudeville or later in radio.) *Funny Girl* is also a continuation of spectacular musical star vehicles, films in which we expect to see large production numbers, beloved old stars—in this case, Walter Pigeon as Florenz Ziegfeld—and the triumph of the female diva over pain and suffering. The Billie Holiday biopic, on the other hand, is a middle of the road attempt to film a life whose content—illegitimacy, liberated or at least non-monogamous sexual behavior, heroin addiction—rendered it highly censorable. Based on how their lives were cinematically constituted, opening up the biopic canon to African-American entertainers represents an ambivalent breakthrough. Rather than showcase exemplary lives in hagiographic terms (which was the mode of inscription for the majority of whites), these films may have dangerously presented a picture in which deviant, proscribed behavior was the norm, a state of affairs which suggested or implied that excess and victimization was the natural state or the price one had to pay to live a famous life if you were a person of color.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Astonishingly, though the year was 1972, it was not only the first American biopic based on the life of a female Black entertainer, but the first biopic featuring a female black figure, period.[4] With a cast featuring Motown soul diva Ross and comedian Richard Pryor, it was also a reach into a very different segment of the audience and talent pool than the Brice biopic.

Most importantly though, *Lady Sings the Blues* acknowledged that in the future, Hollywood's base would be expanded by attracting audience members from such taste cultures as pop recording (which it had always done) and television talk shows, the venues in which, in addition to live performance, Ross and Pryor were most likely to be found. Rather than drawing materials and stars from Broadway musicals and the "legitimate" theater, the producers of *Lady Sings the Blues* drew their strengths from the popular institutions and their products which had clout independent of Hollywood, and in fact, which were on their way to becoming the dominant forces in the 1970s. Seen also in ownership and management of the studios, this pop culture influence altered the superstructure of Hollywood, and thus, obviously, its products as well. Two apparently cookie cutter biopics of female suffering in reality offer us two distinctly different cultures of Hollywood. Their narratives and entertainment underpinnings reveal the difference between a 60s swan song linked to the forces which made up this culture during the the studio era, and a 70s attempt to broaden or realign the biographical canon by using a modified combination of these forces linked to what they saw as the new center of audience tastes and desires.

In a period defined to the point of caricature as being one of change, however, not all portions of Hollywood or every institution outside the film industry underwent marked change. Thus one must chart both those areas which remained relatively unchanged, as well as those in which significant disruptions occurred. For example, the 1970s rise to power of talent agents broke the previous Hollywood pattern of where studio executives came from. With the notable exception of Richard Zanuck (who headed production at Fox between 1962 and 1971), the arrival of executives from outside the culture of the studio lot proper signaled the end of the line for Hollywood's model of management, which for many years had been like a College of Cardinals, a place where because future moguls were selected by a small group of similarly socialized men, the "typical" studio head started out in distribution or exhibition. Linking such changes in corporate organization to the activities of film production can help explain how realigned versions of certain genre films arose in part from changes in personnel, organization, and other key portions of Hollywood's institutions.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

In this regard, the history of one studio, Twentieth Century-Fox, is illustrative. From 1935, when he founded the studio by merging Twentieth Century Pictures with the floundering Fox Films, until his abrupt departure in 1956, Fox was the private cinematic kingdom of Darryl F. Zanuck. Unlike Metro's titan, L. B. Mayer, or Dore Scary, the man who ousted him, or the crazy feuding Warners, all of whom were basically "retired" by others, Zanuck left Hollywood on his own terms. In 1961, on the eve of his spectacular comeback with *The Longest Day* (1962), he told Hedda Hopper why. He left, he said, because he could no longer exercise the authority to make films his way. This centralization of authority in a single position had been a key part of what Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger call the "central producer system," the organizational context out of which Zanuck operated. A former screenwriter who in his fifty year career had mastered and dominated nearly all aspects of filmmaking, Zanuck complained that Hollywood's main problem in the 60s was that the wrong kinds of people were authorized to make decisions about today's films: "Actors are now directing, writing, producing—actors have taken over Hollywood completely, with their agents. They want approval of everything—script, stars, still pictures. . . . The producer," he concluded, "hasn't got a chance to exercise any authority! . . . What the hell—I'm not going to work for them" (3). He didn't. But even though he was one of the most important producers and innovators in the biopic, after 1960 Zanuck's mode of adapting to a changed American entertainment culture shows how at sea the old all-powerful figures were in an industry in which many of the former "givens"—like long-term control over personnel—no longer existed.

The disastrous Gertrude Lawrence biopic *Star!* (1968), and Zanuck's attempt to recreate his hit with D-Day by telling the story of Pearl Harbor in *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), were in a sense attempts to attract the late sixties audience with strategies dredged up from earlier periods in the producer's career. It didn't play. And because the new film people had sunk all their hopes into an equally new strategy, that of the blockbuster, when Zanuck guessed wrong, both films were financial disasters on a scale unimaginable during the studio era.

Yet in certain key areas, the post-studio era biopic universe resembled the studio era. It was still overwhelmingly male: 61 percent of all biopics in this period were about individual male figures; in the studio era, this figure was 65 percent (Custen 103). In the 1960s, 24 percent of the films were about female figures, and in the 1970s that figure stood at 21 percent. In each decade, then, this is actually lower than the studio era norm of 25 percent, though the difference is not so large as to suggest a surprising trend.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

As was the case in the studio era, the corpus of famous people was overwhelmingly white (91 percent post-studio versus 95 percent studio era.) As in the past, the African American figures showcased were either athletes (Muhammad Ali, Jack Johnson) or entertainers (Billie Holiday and Scott Joplin.)

One of the most noteworthy differences after 1960 was that while studio era biopics had focused disproportionately on American figures (66 percent overall), those of the post-studio era reversed this trend. In the 1960s, 46 percent of these films were about famous Americans, while 54 percent were about non-Americans. This percentage of non-Americans was not as high during the 1970s (42 percent), but overall, in terms of nationality, this twenty year period represents a startling reversal from the cinematic chauvinism under which Hollywood had long operated. This new emphasis on foreign figures appears to have two root causes: a rise in the significance of foreign markets, and the new prominence accorded "the big picture," or blockbuster, a film heavy on "readable" action and low on dialogue, which therefore played well in overseas markets not tied to an English speaking population. These films were largely set in "ancient" times: that is, before the Fall of Rome. This practice exoticized foreign figures through the costumes and settings, while at the same time implicitly celebrating the United States (whose biopic figures are almost exclusively from the twentieth century) as the font of modernity. Films set outside the United States—such as *Young Winston* (1972) and *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1963)—focused on figures already valorized here and abroad, though an occasional "exception" to this Macaulayesque take on history, such as *Sinful Davey* (1969), the nineteenth century memoirs of Scotsman David Haggard, suggests that the proliferation of independent production opened up the canon somewhat. We see this same phenomenon in other spheres. A small independent firm, for instance, produced a biopic of Norman Vincent Peale, *One Man's Way* (1964)—hardly mainstream studio fare, but material that a studio in this new age of decentralized production would, in its heightened role as distributor, be happy to take on.

The biggest anomaly in the 1960s was the disproportionate number of films about military figures, which comprised 18 percent of the decade's biopics—the single largest category. This emphasis seems to be a legacy of the Cold War, as Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon continued the military build-up characteristic of postwar presidents. Big biopics of borderline authoritarian sociopaths like *Patton* (1970) alternated with inspiring hagiographic biopics like *PT 109* (1963) Intriguingly, one of the greatest lacunae was the paramour. Under the studio system, this was the second most

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

common female "profession" (almost 18 percent of all female biopics in the studio era were about such women). But these love and sex besotted creatures made up less than 1 percent in the post-studio time. Apparently paramours had moved to television.

Other than these interesting deviations from previously established convention, on the whole the biopics of the 1960s continued to enshrine most of the same kinds of figures Hollywood biographies had always emphasized. Entertainers (13 percent) and artists (10 percent) were still common, accounting for 28 percent of all biopics made in the 60s and 70s. Entertainers had a particularly high profile in the 70s (31 percent), a decade of proliferating independents and star-centered productions. Though I have no definitive data from earlier decades with which I could make an accurate comparison, the post-studio period seems an era in which entertainment in general was a suggestive and evocative subject matter—indicated both by the large number of biopics, and by a significant number of biopics manqué about entertainers. Thus *The Comic* (1969), a showcase for Dick Van Dyke, had the tv star playing a Keatonesque silent star. Using the device of the flashback, the actor narrates his life from within the confines of his own coffin, one-upping the musing dead body in a swimming pool which memorably opens the narration of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). In *Pulp* (1967), Mickey Rooney, himself a virtual relic of the studio system who had partnered Judy Garland in a number of memorable films, here played an old faded star, while Natalie Wood, herself a former child star, portrayed a Garlandesque big-voiced singer in *Inside Daisy Clover* (1965). Combined with the "factual" biopics, these hybrids created a kind of textured pentimento that sentimentally inscribed the patterns and tone of the vanished era in ways a biopic might not. Fittingly, unlike the celebratory fraternity formed by Hollywood's entertainer biopics, many of the subjects of these quasi biopics were shown as washed up, bitter, and forgotten. It was as if only in fiction Hollywood could voice the truth of what had happened to many of its "greats" and to their brand of entertainment.

Intriguingly, unlike the 60s, the biopics of the 70s bypassed certain kinds of elites entirely: military and religious figures, for instance, who had long provided a key example of this traditional definition of greatness. In their place, there was now an even heavier emphasis on entertainers and artists (39 percent in the 1970s vs. 23 percent in the 1960s) (See Table 1. Biopics, 1961–1980). Both the 60s and 70s showcased gangsters and bandits—13 percent in the 60s and 14 percent in the 70s. By this time, royalty, once a staple, had like the empires these figures once oversaw dwindled to an historical curiosity. Regnant in the 1930s (14 percent), when royals

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Table 1. Biopics 1961–1980.**

| | 1961–1970 | | 1971–1980 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | / Percentage | Number | / Percentage | Total |
| Profession | 7 | 10% | 3 | 8% | 10 |
| Artist | 1 | >1% | 2 | 6% | 3 |
| Athlete | – | – | – | – | – |
| Business | 5 | 7% | 5 | 14% | 10 |
| Deviant/ Extraordinary | 1 | >1% | 1 | 3% | 2 |
| Education | 9 | 13% | 11 | 31% | 20 |
| Entertainer | 2 | 3% | – | – | 2 |
| Explorer/ Adventurer | 4 | 6% | – | – | 4 |
| Government/ Politics | – | – | – | – | – |
| Inventor | 1 | >1% | 1 | 3% | 2 |
| Law Enforcement | 2 | 3% | 1 | 3% | 3 |
| Medical/ Scientist | 12 | 18% | 1 | 3% | 13 |
| Military | 9 | 13% | 5 | 14% | 14 |
| Outlaw/ Criminal | – | – | 1 | 3% | 1 |
| Paramour | 10 | 15% | 2 | 6% | 12 |
| Religious/ Biblical | 5 | 7% | 3 | 8% | 8 |
| Royalty | 1 | >1% | – | – | 1 |
| Other | n=69 | | n=36 | | 105 |

were real star figures, they were not nearly as prominent in the 60s (7 percent) and 70s (8 percent), an era without official empires, but when a modified, though no less real, colonialism was practiced.[5] It would take the marriage of Lady Diana Spencer to Charles, Prince of Wales, and the death of Princess Grace of Monaco to bring about a comeback for the royals—and Grace Kelly was arguably an entertainer. When this happened, however, it would be on television rather than in the movie theater. Gone too were those vestiges of Victorian manhood, the explorers and adventurers, who comprised 6 percent of the studio era but less than 2 percent of the post-studio corpus.

When, from 1947, the movies experienced a precipitous drop in attendance (not halted until 1964), Hollywood executives tried many things to

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

recover the lost audience.[6] While portions of the audience, like teenagers, proved ripe for conquest, other segments—most notably, older viewers—proved to be impossible to recapture. Referring to this group as "the lost audience," *Variety* characterized them as "mature, adult people who read good books and magazines." In contrast to the response to the pleasure the "average" patron experienced from the slate of widescreen epics, these people had "literally been driven out of the motion picture theater" (Starr). This disappearance may have been particularly damaging for the biopic, because along with educational blocks typically targeted in marketing campaigns, older viewers were considered the "natural" target for that genre's brand of history and its America-centric values. These rather educated folk were not now nor had they ever really been deemed the core audience of the movies. Taking a hint from the introduction of CinemaScope with *The Robe* (1953), the 1960s proved an anomalous decade in another sense as well: pictures about religious figures accounted for 15 percent of all biopics. Until this decade this kind of life had maintained a regularly low, almost regulated profile (2.5 percent in the 1930s and 1940s, and 3 percent in the 1950s). The enormous increase in religious biopics in the 1960s speaks less to some vague spiritual revival in the country—many of these "Biblical" films were about how sinful folks were back then—than it suggests that since the domestic box office showed no sign of emerging from its post-1947 downward trend, foreign markets had taken on an increased significance. Like the earliest silent films, the Biblical films were largely action-based, visual spectacles whose sparse dialogue contained stories familiar to most Christians since childhood. Such familiarity allowed these tales to be reenacted—again—in a form tailored to appeal to the foreign grosses.

In fact, many of these "Biblical" pictures were nothing but displays of plenitude (and pulchritude). Various developments in technology—wide screen, stereophonic sound—made their slight stories more visually and aurally overpowering than ever. Because of this balance, these films also, pointedly, set themselves apart from television. As one scholar characterized the strategy, confronted with television's "talking heads," film executives thought "'We'll give them something television can't" (Balio 23). But television turned the tables in the 70s. Unable to compete at the level of spectacle, it focused instead on content. TV biopics would, for the most part, focus on the seedy or pathological angle of fame, leaving Hollywood with its increasingly outdated and unhip "great man" approach.

The religious epics (or "biblicals" as they were called in the trade) were characterized by Philip Dunne—who wrote three of them—as following, or perhaps updating, a well-known Southern California version of a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Biblical adage: "In the motion picture industry, blessed are the moneymakers, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (256). These "big pictures" were part of a larger trend: the blockbuster, which started in 1952, when the grosses of the top two pictures of that year, *The Greatest Show on Earth* (one of De Mille's last triumphs) and *Quo Vadis,* were nearly triple those of the picture in the number five position (*Sailor Beware)* (Brown 211). Not surprisingly, when the next year *The Robe* did nearly twice the business of De Mille's film, Hollywood became convinced that the big box office of "the big picture"—that is, a spectacular effort, with a correspondingly large budget—was the way out of its doldrums (Balio 24). Though Hollywood had always had "road show" films full of spectacle, the fifties strategy of banking all profits on one or two "big" films came at a time when the structure of the industry could least afford such a gamble: studios were making fewer movies each year. In the sixties and seventies, this accepted philosophy of carrying a studio with a few "big pictures" gave way to its steroid-fed mutation: the blockbuster, a film whose budget, visual plenitude, and commodity tie-ins often equaled what two decades before had been the annual budget for a studio's entire program. As in other genres, this shift in strategy can be seen in the biopic. In 1963, two of the top films were biopics, while two were historical epics or period pieces: *Cleopatra, The Longest Day, Lawrence of Arabia,* and *How the West Was Won.* The lone exception to this among the top five grossing films that year—*Irma La Douce*—was a big-budgeted musical, holding the number three spot. Though the fact that two of these top five were biopics might seem a hopeful sign, it wasn't. I have already suggested that the wisdom of tying the rest of Hollywood to the fate of a few big-budgeted films had wildly uneven results. The biopic, before this time, had not been conceptualized as a blockbuster. Instead, it was most often a smaller budgeted, person centered, and therefore often star centered, drama. The success of a biopic property owned by Fox for some time, *The Sound of Music* (1965), raised hopes that an "old style" film of mass appeal might still hold the key to future successes. But attempts to replicate the phenomenal grosses of the Trapp family biopic produced instead the opposite: deficits of star proportions, with biopics like *Star!* and non-biopic fare such as *Hello Dolly* (1967) and *Dr. Doolittle* (1969). While *A Man for All Seasons* (1966) and *Lawrence of Arabia* showed that painting the biopic on large-scale canvases could have rewarding financial and critical results, the human-centered engine at the heart of the biopic was usually antithetical to the techno-driven displays that the blockbuster soon became.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Though five of the 60s top twenty box office draws were biopics, rather than signaling a renaissance of pictures whose showcase placed an emphasis on humanist accomplishment, these films were really a kind of last hurrah for the human in the garden, who was about to be overthrown by his own machines. By the 1970s, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1979), that decade's highest grossing biopic, could only manage a thirty-fourth place showing in a universe now dominated by high-end displays of technology in films like *Star Wars* (1977) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). From such data, which suggested that measured by the degree to which movies adhered to or abandoned previously established patterns in a number of areas of the film culture—on subject matter, race, gender, and support of the standard power structure—it appears as if the studio era really died not in the 1960s, as Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger suggest, but in the next decade. By some of their own gauges, the characteristics, both formal and organizational, of the late 1950s continued into the 1960s. It was not until the 1970s that changes in several key indicators—the numeric decline, the absence of certain conventional elites such as religious and military figures, the added focus on techno-driven narratives—combined with changes in patterns of ownership, signaled that the mode of production and the films that went with it had in fact changed and in some cases mutated.

The 1970s represented the moment when men with different training finally took over Hollywood. Zanuck, the last of the old-time moguls, was forced out in 1971, but he was forced out of a Hollywood in which, starting with the takeover of Paramount by Gulf & Western in 1966, the cast struggling for control of the studios and their parent film corporations had undergone a change. The studios were increasingly either owned by conglomerates, or had been forced to conglomerate themselves, as in the case of Warner Bros., which became Time Warner. During this period, the communications technologies of cable, computer, and satellite blurred the boundaries between production and distribution, creating the larger category of information. Though the trade press at first despaired over these non-film trained investment outsiders who "lacked any traditional respect for their studio's history, institution and products," those corporate types, strong in deal making and subsidiary rights, utterly disinterested in story or structure, in fact forced the outmoded industry to face up to the challenge represented by television and other technologies. This approach revived the economic health of the system. In a sense, the Rupert Murdochization of Fox—a movie studio, a tv network, and HarperCollins publishers—was just Marcus Loew's Zen adage ("We sell tickets to theaters, not movies") on a larger scale.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The continuing obsession with the blockbuster, a film increasingly floated by digitized displays of technology, made the notions of hands-on artistry, the guild, and craft ethos only a distantly remembered metaphor. Technology as the dominant organizing force behind a film represented a significant shift in studio thinking about what kinds of films drew the most moviegoers. Spectacle has always been a key element in Hollywood showmanship, but at least until the 1970s this meant spectacle in which humans played a significant part, both in front of and behind the camera. The advent of digital technology, with its virtual ability to reinvent reality, marked the return to a cinema of attractions. The Hollywood of Lucas and Spielberg adopted a new strategy which actually was as old as the cinema itself. Six of the ten highest grossing films of the 1970s utterly depended on displays of technology rather than on human performance, or even on the spectacle of crowds of people doing something worthy or heinous. As it was in cinema's earliest days, the invention itself became the prime focus of public discourse. Yet, while the rest of Hollywood's genres were energized or eviscerated by cinema's new change, the biopic underwent few structural changes in its highly theatrical form. Correctly reading the trends, television rather than film was responsible for what little innovation was possible, as it capitalized in its biopics on the dark side of fame.

With technology enshrined and stars producing their own films, the conditions which defined the early days of film had passed through their "classical" period and come full circle into the 1970s. We might therefore proclaim the post-studio decades as the time in which many film genres outside of tv, including the biopic, ran out of gas and permutations. But the genres themselves lived on, in part because they were necessary cogs in a system which, though it survived along with them, had a vastly different context than Darryl Zanuck had ever known. With rare exceptions like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), cautious biopic producers followed the trends more closely than ever, placing a kabuki-like mask on fame. Meanwhile, baby boomers deserted the movies for tv or the Internet or the stock market, so in the end we had all passed through a new portal, moving from a purportedly golden time into the age of mechanical life in the era of human reproduction.

In *The Planet of the Apes* (1968), Richard Zanuck inaugurated a series of inexpensively made but highly profitable films which I have always read as a parable of the studio system. (But then, how could Darryl's son, a brilliant producer in his own right, do otherwise?) In the first film, Charlton Heston starred as a stranded astronaut—a brilliant choice, since casting a star whose career course was floundering as a man whose career was "off

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

course" to the stars called forth all the serious woodenness of an actor a *Cahiers* writer once described as existing as "an axiom of the cinema" (Wollen 79). Having built his fame on playing Moses and Judah Ben Hur, Heston was one of the last of the old-time movie stars, and he certainly posed like one. Those of us who never much liked right-wing, gun toting Chuck and his chia-pet like toupee took great pleasure in seeing the poor soul stripped of his protective suit and his star persona. Forced to wear a loin cloth, held captive by men dressed in leatherette ape outfits, Heston seemed perversely at home within this improbable, but hugely profitable, devolutionary scenario—especially if we read it as a highly coded bondage scene, with nets, leather, and masters and slaves. (What must Roddy McDowall have thought of all this!) But really, the sight of Moses in a low budget sci-fi film being tormented by a lower life form is about as good an image as you are ever likely to see of what Hollywood must have felt when it was toppled by tv. And as for the biopic, its figures often seemed to be humans subdued by lesser beings, or befuddled wizards or inventors, or generals who, stripped of a world in which the performance of human agency represented a goal to be achieved, were now forced to live as props (necessary ones) in the age of their own machines.

Yet, the frame of reference of the post-studio biopic is not only about technology and corporate images. It was not all blockbusters. The greatest factor in explaining the nature of post-1960 biopics was the presence of television. Faced with the challenge from the small screen, Hollywood tended to overcompensate in its efforts to differentiate itself from its novice rival. All films, but biopics in particular, often seemed constructed primarily of things which television did not or could not offer. A variation of the idea of fetish value, which holds that a commodity's worth is inversely related to the scarcity of its supply or availability, the new Hollywood goal was to produce something that people valued enough that they would pay to behold it outside the home. This valorization of scarcity was brought home to me when, while watching a preview for a particularly bad film, an audience member hollered out "Straight to tape," a judgment which underscored the higher prestige still attached to theatrical release. Though admissions have risen to $10 per ticket in New York, the very transaction of paying creates a cognitive dissonance: it must be better than tv—still widely, if mistakenly, believed to be a "free" commodity—because I am paying for it. Within a consumer culture, television's benefits—its convenience, apparent cost, novelty, and pervasive presence in the home—still may not be enough to fully vanquish film's assets: its scale and exoticism, its invocation of a sense

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

of awe and ritual, its fetish value. Unlike tv, film would not show but showcase life, a formulation whose operationalization could take many forms, but most commonly those of technological and sensory plenitude.

## CONCLUSIONS

The durability of the biopic, its formulaic strength, arose from the relative profitability and stability of a certain system of production which relied on genres and stars. One way Hollywood's executives responded to social change was to insist that their way of seeing was still the right way. In their world—which had become *the* world—there were certain structures whose values were rock solid, whose casts seldom altered, and whose forms were permanently fixed. Thus one form of response was to try to inscribe history from your point of view—writing in, if you could, a good part for yourself. The last days of the studio system, in the 1950s, were the high-water mark for the biopic, because the genre was useful not only for staging history, but for setting up a worldview which justified Hollywood's place within this country. Accordingly, while history texts were open to any number of subject possibilities, the biographical films of the 1950s were disproportionately about entertainers and the world of show business.[7] Framing the world in this way had a purpose. Instead of focusing on "those traits that characterized the famous person in his or her own lifetime," the studios would argue that "the greatness of the individual figure becomes that set of qualities that made a producer great or powerful in Hollywood" (Custen 4–5). In addition to telling the Emersonian life tales of great men, these films dutifully proclaimed the superiority of Hollywood's own values by linking show business codes to strongly established icons and ideas of Americanness. Such hymns of greatness to Americans of the past were thus really Hollywood's song to itself.

But this fairly stable configuration of the studio system was shaken—at first gradually by threats of unionization, changing tax laws, and the Depression, and then in the years after World War II, at an increasing rate.[8] The stars and genres which once were a kind of homeostatic gyroscope were less stable because they were aging. In addition, most major actors were unwilling to sign long-term contracts because they could make more money and have more freedom by incorporating themselves. Seared by McCarthyism and the threat of tv, for a time in the 1950s Hollywood ran for cover under the safety net of Biblical spectacles whose content seemed ideologically invulnerable, even though the films themselves were often open to cruel critical attack. But framing history as a clean wholesome

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

commodity—with the notable exception of the De Mille branch, which Philip Dunne observed, produced "exercises in sex and sadism masquerading as religion"—became a tougher sell (249).

Now today in the age of cable, a communication form not subject to the same codes of censorship as commercial broadcasting, basing a season on "wholesome" fare is no mean feat. Particularly after the 1980s days of tabloid tv, luring a public weaned on sensational material, some with startling words and images which barely seem to have been edited at all, is more difficult than ever. Cable's ability to open the borders to villainy and violence inevitably altered the definition of every genre, and particularly those whose reality was sustained through a denial of this world. Though until the 90s, the change was apparent largely on television, this shift in definition not only changed our ideas about what constituted a great life, it reconfigured our notions of fame itself.

Writing about any genre of popular culture means conceiving of it in terms that make it part of what George Gerbner refers to as "the symbolic environment":

> For the first time in human history, most children are born into homes where most of the stories do not come from their parents, schools, churches and communities, and in many places even from their native countries, but from a handful of conglomerates who have something to sell. . . . Media are coalescing into *an integrated cultural environment* that constrains life's choices as the natural environment defines life's chances. (qtd. in Budd et al. 12, emphasis mine.)

We have spent, in this country, the better part of our lives watching and listening to mediated narratives. Some of these stories claim to be true. Others, announcing themselves as fiction, carry far more weight than the truth could sustain. Through its demography of fame, the biopic illustrates our skewed idea of social power. Considering the fate of the biopic in the years after the studio system does not require thinking about any single film as representative of the genre's altered or unaltered morphology. Rather, the biopic is part of a taxonomy made up of other films, other mediated realities, other parts of the vast carnival which makes up American commercial amusement. Far too embedded in its relations with other filmic texts, and far too interconnected to other media (both as part of a system of narrative and as a commercial entity with a potentially long and resurrected half life), the single film is only as interesting as the larger pattern to which it is connected and to the larger codes it forms or whose forms it violates. In the end, it is uncertain whether the biopic's political or aesthetic pretensions to power are Jakobsen's "dominant," with which one could assess the evolution,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

meaning, and significance of this genre. It is the intersection of a number of these factors discussed—the acts and actors, the witnesses, the mediation and the attempts to control this, the system of dissemination, the nature of the audience—that makes up a culture's sense of history. And certainly the biopic, that "true" story of a figure we have chosen to celebrate and condemn, has played and continues to play a significant part in determining how our culture constructs its notions of fame, and what it takes to be a celebrated figure.[9]

But because so much of this process of making and receiving history is tied in with television broadcasting and cable, thinking about Hollywood after 1960 means thinking about the evolution in the forms of communication. We can represent our starting point in 1960 by placing the viewer on one of those morphed time lines so popular today. If you started that decade writing about movies on a typewriter or with a pen, you did so with your tv set turned on in whatever room you happened to be. As the years pass, though, through the wonders of digital imagery we see our writer age. The decor changes, and the succeeding years will see us writing—processing—on a computer, which embeds images into our text. We do this in an environment which, in addition to tv's white noise, is now filled with the cacophony of a stereo, a walkman, a gameboy, a vcr, a "home entertainment system," and a raft of other computer-generated adult toys. Occasionally a human being wanders in. Thus the whole environment in which entertainment is made and experienced has changed. In the same way, the world in which fame was figured has changed as much as the capacities we have to store and retrieve our thoughts about this change.

Going to the movies in the studio era meant going out in public, with all the cosmetic presentation of self attendant to such a ritual. Watching tv meant staying home. In fact, before long, watching tv, an activity first coded as something you chose to do, was identified with that dreaded box no one wants to check off: doing nothing, or even worse, having nothing to do. With their deliberate connections to codes of royalty and rites of religious pageantry and worship, the movie palaces or cathedrals gave way in the 1960s to a much less grand, though equally socially ambitious structure, the suburban home, that domus which sheltered the frame of television. And that medium's take on what constituted "a great life" more closely reflected tv's conditions than the idea of greatness constructed by the classical cinema.

It was not just that the subject matter or the attitudes towards fame had changed. Like some pod from *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* tv seemed to have replaced or switched the corpus within the frame. Thus, even when the Hollywood of the 70s focused on its "standard" subject, its take—in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

*Ludwig* (1972), *Valentino* (1977), *The Music Lovers* (1970)—is more like tv's tabloid attitude toward fame than the pose of veneration taken during the studio era. We see this tv-invasion, too, in biopics of ordinary people to whom something awful happens, as in *Midnight Express* (1978), *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1975), and *Julia* (1977), and later in *Sid and Nancy* (1986) or *The Sheltering Sky* (1990). Then as now, both film and tv do praise already famous men—and far less frequently women. Even on tv, fame was still a male preserve, and the higher percentage of women subjects can not be thought of as a feminization of public history. The tv female eminence could not display the valor or achievements of her male counterparts. Instead, she was an ordinary person—or a celebrity—to whom something awful had happened. Though scoffed at by "serious people," these films were not so much lessons in history as they were Adorno-esque demonstrations of how we represent the distribution of power. In such films, the poor suffering victims, already famous or enshrined through pain, prepared, like the rest of us, to take their medicine. In a different time, when images of Hiroshima and the Holocaust are as common as Nike ads, that old "standard" version of history—essentially a cartoon of Emerson's dicta that "there is properly no history; only biography"—seems transmuted effortlessly from that understanding of the past which every schoolboy knew to the status of an outdated travesty. From being a thing canted, the Hollywood biopic glided into camp, as ridicule and envy replaced reverence.

Near the end of his time in Hollywood, Darryl Zanuck told Philip Dunne, "We made the stars, but they've forgotten that. Now they think they're entitled to run the business. Faces, that's all they are, just faces, but in today's market it's only faces that count, not brains" (277). Though this dialogue reads like something Norma Desmond would say in *Sunset Boulevard,* Zanuck's views make one wonder. Instead of watching Swanson and Holden in a movie directed by Wilder, had Zanuck been reading Leo Lowenthal? Or perhaps like the rest of us in the late 50s, had he just been staying home, watching too much television? Had the last of Hollywood's old-time showmen done this in his final sad years in Palm Springs, it is likely that rather than seeing Clio in a theatre, he would have seen her on a talk show plugging her latest made-for-tv biopic.

Its plot? The former muse—Barbara Eden? Linda Evans? Too bad Elizabeth Montgomery died . . . —is now a hapless victim. She is struggling valiantly against the forces of conservative revisionism who would gladly take her back to the days when moguls (Richard Crenna? Ben Gazzara?) molded her identity, and male directors (Robert Stack?) told her how to

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

pose and act. Clio resists, in part because focus groups tell her females in the audience expect a certain amount of feminist discourse, and in part because she has been around town long enough to know that it might mean a sequel. Maybe even a mini-series: *Clio in Hollywood: The Post-Studio Years.* It's a good story, though now as ever, only parts of it are really true.

## NOTES

1. Mead articulates her point of view in *The Study of Culture at a Distance.*
2. Unlike the body of data on which I based my analysis of films of the studio era in *Bio/Pics,* here I put less emphasis on archival materials, rhetorical devices, and detailed "natural histories" of production, and more on the overall contours of fame created in the demography of the worlds limned in these post-studio products.
3. For these terms, as well as Blumer's work, see Lowery and DeFleur.
4. Those who argue for Cleopatra's status as Black may be right, but you would never guess this from the Miami tan of Elizabeth Taylor.
5. There are strong parallels between the leftover remnants of power which can be found in the post-studio and post-colonial worlds.
6. Balio's anthology, *Hollywood in the Age of Television,* provides a good overview.
7. Popular entertainers or artists were the subjects of 47 out of the decade's 107 biopics (44 percent). In contrast, the twelve biopics of military figures accounted for only 11 percent of the 1950s total. These figures are particularly telling viewed in the context of how the subjects fared in the 60s and 70s.
8. Finler notes that economic indicators suggest that "many of the weaknesses and problems date back to the 30s" (33).
9. As an example, consider two films about female stars. One film valorizes a life of untouchable artistry, and tries belatedly to open up history texts and make room for both Billie Holiday's genius, and her femaleness and blackness, in a real and symbolic world where neither attribute has been supported. But within the contours of the cultural work conventionally ascribed to or performed by the biopic, *Lady Sings the Blues* is less important than another, very different film life featuring the story of a person whose talent was murder not music. But when she is played (very much against the grain of the real-life figure whose name she temporarily occupies) by the very pale Faye Dunaway, the sociopath Bonnie Parker is a more compelling figure than Billie Holiday, because *Bonnie and Clyde*—in its editing, its oblique approach to sexuality, its take on the moral "badness" of its characters—attempts to bring the tradition of a life on film into the mores of the 1960s, accentuating rather than denying the connection between the characters' relationship to the genre's ideas of history and Hollywood's codes of articulating entertainment. Rather than erase this mediatedness, Penn's film (which had originally been offered to both Godard and Truffaut) places the ability of the director (and the actors and other creative personnel) to bend and manipulate at the center of its panopticon. In flaunting the underpinnings of its

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

fictive discourse, ironically it brings us closer to the historic sense of the characters. This history is produced through a voice that neither attempts nor pretends to speak with the values of the era in which the characters lived. Rather, its version of history is unabashedly linked with the values of the years in which the film was made.

## WORKS CITED


Balio, Tino, ed. *Hollywood in the Age of Television.* Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing.* London: Penguin, 1972.

Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960.* New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

Braudy, Leo. *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History.* New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Brown, Gene. *Movie Time: A Chronology of Hollywood and the Movie Industry from Its Beginnings to the Present.* New York: Macmillan, 1995.

Budd, Mike, Steve Craig, and Clay Steinman. *Consuming Environments: Television and Commercial Culture.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999.

Cheney, Lynne. *American Memory: A Report on Humanities in the Nation's Public Schools.* Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1987.

Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.

Denby, David. "Emile and Louis and Mikhail and Vaclav." *Premiere* 3.12 (Aug. 1990): 34–35.

Dunne, Philip. *Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics.* 1980. New York: Limelight Editions, 1990.

Finler, Joel. *The Hollywood Story.* New York: Crown, 1988.

Gabler, Neal. *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality.* New York: Knopf, 1998.

Gamson, Joshua. *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.

Hopper, Hedda. Interview with Darryl F. Zanuck. Nov. 12, 1960. The Hedda Hopper Collection. The Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Beverly Hills, CA.

Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Biography as an Art Form of the New Bourgeoisie." *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays.* Ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.

Lowery, Shearon A., and Melvin L. DeFleur. "The Payne Fund Studies: The Effects of Movies on Children." *Milestones in Mass Communication Research: Media Effects.* 3rd ed. White Plains: Longman, 1995. 21–42.

Mead, Margaret, and Rhoda Metraux, eds. *The Study of Culture at a Distance.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1953.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Powdermaker, Hortense. *Hollywood the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers.* Boston: Little Brown, 1950.

Rosenzweig, Roy, and David Thelen. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life.* New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

Starr, Alfred. "The Lost Audience Is Still Lost." *Variety,* Jan. 16, 1954: 61.

Strachey, Lytton. *Eminent Victorians.* 1918. The Illustrated Edition. New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988.

Wollen, Peter. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema.* 3rd ed. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1972.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# "EVERYBODY LOVES SOMEBODY": THE A&E "RAT PACK" BIOGRAPHIES

MIKITA BROTTMAN

The growth of photography and the motion picture industry in the twentieth century has been coterminous with the cult of the celebrity personality. When specific actors and actresses suddenly became valuable, sought-after property, when the ticket-selling faces took on names, then the star system was born. Or as Kenneth Anger puts it, "Cinemaland was cursed in its cradle by that fateful chimera, the 'Star'" (28). The cult of celebrity experienced such rapid and prodigious expansion that by the middle years of the current century audiences were accustomed to being persuaded that they had special and privileged access to the off-screen, day-to-day lives of the "stars." In certain circumstances, fans found themselves encouraged by studio publicity mechanisms to attempt to erode the boundaries separating the individual ego from the personality of the celebrity, thereby allowing the fan to identify *completely* with the blessed life of the star. Writer Jay McInerney claims that it's an indication of a collapsed value system when the "great chain of being" seems to be defined by our distance from these empty luminaries—or our connection to them, however vague—and when the highest rung on the social order is occupied by these people, who are "essentially not anything" ("Questions").

For some, the celebrity is a mirror, a reflection in which the public studies and adjusts its own image of itself (Durgnat 137–38). For others, the celebrity is a direct or indirect projection of the needs, drives, and dreams of American society (Walker xi). As Richard Dyer point out, "stars have a privileged position in the definition of social roles and types, and this must have real consequences in terms of how people believe they can and should behave" (8). This privileged position is maintained in a variety of different ways. Primarily, it's maintained by the public relations industry that grows


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

up alongside any successful celebrity. This industry allows us to amass, without any conscious effort on our part, a tremendous wealth of details concerning every aspect of the star's life and lifestyle—from biographical accounts of childhood by close friends or family members, to photographic archives recording various hair styles and the history of outfits worn on various occasions, to graphic accounts of emotional intimacies and sexual preferences. It's also maintained by techniques like the close-up, a device that Bela Balazs describes as appearing to reveal "the hidden mainsprings of a life which we thought we already knew so well" (185), and by such mechanisms as the cinema or television celebrity "biopic."

Critics have often observed how celebrity personalities are "constructed" by the entertainment industry. This "personality construction" is so intrinsic to the "star system," so taken for granted by film and television audiences, that it's sometimes very difficult to understand how far it goes, where it begins, and when—if ever—it ends. These constructions, which include notions about what "makes" a star, and how people "become" stars, are so deeply entrenched in the ideology of western culture that they may perhaps be better described as myths.

## "TOUCHED WITH MAGIC"

One of these myths is the belief that stars become stars because they are "touched with magic" in the form of "great talent," "a rare personality," "an instantaneous connection with the public," "an overabundance of charismatic on-screen charm," or "the ability to make you care" (Wilkerson and Borie 181). Another myth is the idea that stars get "discovered," as in the old story of the accidentally-spotted soda-fountain girl who was quickly elevated to stardom—a myth that, according to Daniel Boorstin, "soon took its place alongside the log-cabin-to-White-House legend as a leitmotif of American democratic folk-lore" (162).[1] Other celebrity myths include the "star plucked out of nowhere who becomes difficult and uncooperative," the "big star who's declined into obscurity," the "star who sacrificed everything on the altar of ambition," and the overarching myth of "Hollywood as destroyer."

These myths, of course, all change and develop over time. It was once widely believed, for example, that the role and the performance in a film revealed something about the star's personality, which was then "corroborated" by stories in fan magazines and similar "reliable" sources. In other words, the plot of a film was often regarded at some level as the working out of the actor/character's inherent nature. A good example of this is the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

"character" of Greta Garbo, whose line "I want to be alone" in *Grand Hotel* in 1933 was attributed again and again to the "real" Garbo (who requested only that the press stop hounding her), and interpreted as the expression of an innate, fundamental, and even "metaphysical" personal desire (Dyer 176, 181n).

Today, this myth has been replaced by the new myth of "contradictions-in-the-image" when viewed retroactively. For example, as Richard Dyer points out, today's Bogart cult tends to see him at odds with his contemporary image—more full of worldly wisdom perhaps—just as today's Marilyn Monroe cult sees her as full of tragic consciousness—a quality so at odds with her movie roles that to the modern viewer, the contradictions threaten to fragment the image altogether (71).

This current wave of celebrity myths was ushered in by a cluster of scandalous "true-life" Hollywood chronicles published in the 1970s. Heralded by Kenneth Anger's infamous *Hollywood Babylon* series, other outrageous publications included *Haywire* (1977), Brooke Hayward's chronicle of her life as the daughter of prima donna mother Margaret Sullavan, and *Mommie Dearest* (1981), Christina Crawford's inglorious depiction of her movie-star parent. Since the 1970s, no celebrity biography or biopic has been complete without its sordid accounts of the "seamy side" of stardom—the myths of destruction, of celebrity scandals, of Hollywood's "dark side." The glamor and the tinsel, the beautiful people and their daring love affairs, are now equally famous for their sordid underbelly—the realm of greed, lust, jealousy, and shame. As long as there is a celebrity elite living in an illusory world of sparkle and style, as long as Hollywood fuels dreams of a glamorous, sexually charged, thrill-packed universe, there will continue to be stories told of intolerable pressures, violence, and catastrophe.

Myths of Hollywood's dark side generally tend to revolve around the legendary "pressures" that every star must face: the criticism, the hypocrisy, the backstabbing, the extravagance, the dramas and scandals, the searching inquisitions into private lives, and the fabled rejection that follows the legendary adulation. Looking at the stars now involves looking underneath their skirts, inspecting their pants, sniffing their bedsheets, and spying through their bedroom keyholes. Today, the celebrity biopic is expected to chronicle not just the lavish homes and priceless jewelry, but the personal anxieties and emotional tensions, the drunken collapses and nervous breakdowns that lead to frenetic and distasteful contests of luridity between the tabloids, gleeful at the misfortunes of the rich and famous.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## MASS FANTASY

Since its inception in 1984, the A&E Biographies® series has become extremely successful. Currently airing six nights a week on the A&E Channel, it covers a diverse three hundred subjects a year, and attracts more than two million viewers each evening. Each episode is marketed separately on video. *Biography Magazine* gives more celebrity gossip; an A&E Biography® Web Site went online in July 1996; and an A&E Biography® Book Series was launched by Crown Publishing in July 1997. And January 1999 witnessed the inauguration, with much hoopla, of the A&E Biography® Channel.[2] The entire A&E Biography® "system" is in fact a subtly coordinated marketing process, most apparent on the A&E Biography® web site, with its online cyberstore offering home video versions of almost every A&E Biography® ever shown, plus all the customary books, t-shirts, baseball caps, and embroidered sweatshirts.

"More and more," Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins have remarked in *Imagining Reality*, "screens and images are places where we access aspects of the real world, but also escape and ignore it" (311). What is particularly fascinating about the A&E Biography® is the way in which it deliberately eschews the contemporary model of the celebrity narrative, consciously rejecting appeals to voyeurism, and instead attempting to present a mass fantasy of the happiness of mythical pasts. In doing so, the A&E Biography® returns to a much earlier style of celebrity-watching, one whose standard formulaic features are a veneration and magnification so extreme as to rewrite history, even at the cost of refusing to acknowledge sometimes fairly well-known facts.

In its supposedly purest form, the "documentary-biography" seeks to re-present reality, including the inner reality of the subject, through the precise selection of objects surveyed by the camera and sounds recorded by the microphone—objectively produced subjective truths. What is so fascinating and compelling about the A&E Biographies® are the ways in which they consciously reject any attempts to reproduce objective reality, instead employing a deliberate policy of reducing complex lives to simple formulae, enacting fantasies of reassurance through the presentation of stereotyped characters, predictable "ironic twists," moral reductions, and melodramatic narratives of good and evil. Though presented as "biographies," the programs are in fact disturbingly reductive rewritings of history—"official portraits," glossily sliding over the surface of events, which vastly magnify the significance of some rather ordinary people, without ever probing into the motives or psychologies of these purported "subjects." In fact,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

since it seems to have no power to recontain any historical transgressions, the A&E Biography® often serves simply to reestablish the conventions that produce the usual gender, sexual, class, and racial hierarchies in American culture.

To illustrate this general tendency, I will look closely at a cluster of biographies screened in mid-January 1999, which focused on Frank Sinatra and his friends, the "Rat Pack." Two general Rat Pack documentaries were broadcast on January 3rd and 4th, 1999. A Dean Martin biography aired January 5th, followed by a show on Sammy Davis Jr. on the 6th. Ava Gardner was featured on January 7th, and the subject on the 8th was Mafia boss Sam Giancana. Finally, the two initial documentaries were rebroadcast on January 9th and January 10th. Now available for purchase as individual videotapes, these programs can also be bought at a discount as the "Rat Pack Set." This short series of documentaries closely approaches the classic narrative form. A sense of closure and assumptions of individual agency brings each "life story" within the folds of the larger narrative history—that of the Rat Pack. The timely screening of this series soon after the death of Frank Sinatra in late 1998 offered viewers the opportunity to probe into the myths of this fascinating group of characters while the memories of its leader were still fresh.

Though narrated by Danny Aiello, these shows are introduced and brought to a close by A&E Biography® host Peter Graves. For these shows, Graves sits on a black couch in a tuxedo, his bowtie loosened rakishly, a decanter of whisky and a highball glass on the cocktail table beside him. As he speaks, smoke rises through the air, as if from a cigarette smoldering in an ashtray somewhere, although no cigarette is actually ever shown. The impression is calculatedly that of a "swinger"—perhaps in the back room of some Vegas nightclub, or back in his hotel room after a party—waiting for his playboy friends to join him.

Each biography is fifty minutes long, except for the two "double feature" Rat Pack biographies, which are broadcast over two nights. Commercial breaks separate the shows into five sections of about ten minutes each. Interviews and reminiscences are complemented by clips from Rat Pack movies and the friends' legendary show at the Sands Casino. Stock historical footage, loosely assembled, completes the picture.

## SAINTS AND SINNERS

It appears that after being selected as a candidate for an episode of "A&E Biography," the subject is subsequently placed in one of the two simple

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

categories of hero or villain. The villains are mass murderers (David Berkowitz, Ted Bundy), "gurus of evil" (Charles Manson, Marshall Applewhite), or Mafia dons (Sam Giancana). Everybody else is a hero. The hero does not have to be clearly heroic to deserve biographical treatment—recent shows have focused, for example, on Ann Landers, Anthony Robbins, and Regis Philbin—but the biography itself ensures they are elevated to a heroic position. Minor figures from the world of cinema and television are often made the subjects of popular celebration and veneration, their life stories restructured as melodramatic narratives which, to maintain the mass fantasy, often take some obvious liberties with the historical truth. As a result, these "heroic" figures often appear to be more symbolic and representational than real.

The Rat Pack, of course, are all heroes, and the only "villain" associated with them is Mafia don Sam Giancana. Although very little mention is made of the Rat Pack's involvement with Giancana, it is significant that his biography is shown as part of the Rat Pack "cluster," along with a show about the kidnapping of Frank Sinatra's son, and the biography of Ava Gardner. As the only non-venerational biography in the series, the Giancana documentary deserves closer scrutiny. Presented by Jack Perkins, and written and directed by Christopher Olgiati, this is in fact a vastly condensed and simplified version of a much longer and more complicated documentary made by the BBC. More graphic in its details of murder and torture, that documentary spends a lot more time explaining and analyzing the rather complicated series of relationships between Giancana, the Mafia, the Rat Pack, the Kennedys, and the C.I.A.

In contrast, the "BBC/A&E co-production" is a hugely simplified, one-dimensional portrait of "a man who in later life would stick ice-picks into the brains of his victims." While Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and Sammy Davis Jr. are venerated as virtual saints, the "brutal" Giancana becomes "an animal force, unleashed on the underworld," "a gun for hire, a freelance enforcer who killed for order"—"Barely out of his teens, legend has it, he'd killed twenty men." Giancana "told his brother that he enjoyed killing." Distinctions between fact and fiction become increasingly hazy, as the voice-over backs stills of bodies gunned down in the St. Valentine's Day massacre and other famous murders, followed by interviews with Giancana's daughter and others who knew him.

Little mention is made of Giancana's class and ethnic background, and no evidence contradicts his depiction as a "constitutional psychopath." Even the description of his romantic relationship with singer Phyllis McGuire of the clean-cut McGuire Sisters indulges in the usual binary

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

platitudes ("She—pure as the driven snow. He—evil incarnate. Wherever the sisters went, the gangster followed.") More anecdotes of his "terrifying legend" follow, accompanied by more stills of dead bodies, until all at once, "Giancana seemed suddenly old, even vulnerable," and he's gunned down at home by one of his many enemies. "He was cooking sausages," the voice-over informs us, as we gaze at Giancana's body on a slab in the morgue: "A few minutes later, he was dead."

The Ava Gardner biography is equally simplistic. Since her stormy marriage to Frank Sinatra is the only reason for Gardner's inclusion in the Rat Pack "cluster," the show devotes the most attention to that part of her life. There is plenty of information about Frank and Ava's "tempestuous relationship"—fiery temperaments, primitive passions, acrimony, jealousy, accusations and counteraccusations—but very little about Ava's films, or her talents as an actress and singer. This biography seems determined to recreate the "spirit" of Gardner's life, rather than its details, exploiting for dramatic effect the major facets of how that life was publicly perceived. Consequently, and in line with audience expectations, she becomes primarily an elemental comeuppance to Sinatra's inflated ego. The mythic structure of the Rat Pack "cluster" has no room for her own talents as a performer.

After relating details of her divorce from Sinatra, the Gardner biography rapidly segues into the "ruined by success" paradigm, emphasizing the emotional price Ava was forced to pay for being a matchless beauty and sought-after celebrity. The operant myth is rise-and-fall. Plenty of time is devoted to Ava's final years in London, where she is depicted as an eccentric, Garboesque recluse, victim of the destructive undertow of the glamorous world of show business. Unable to "handle" the "loss of her beauty," she escapes from the "unbearable pressures" of Hollywood by moving to Europe, where she lives alone, with her beloved dogs. Suffused with sympathy and convenient omissions, this Ava Gardner biography is nostalgia-based, tragic-hued, and wholly in keeping with the A&E mythic construction of the show-business narrative paradigm.

Like network news, the A&E Biography® makes heavy use of melodramatic codings in its representations of reality. Subjects are on the side of good or evil—"one of us" or "one of them." Life histories are narratives of conflict, rivalry, sacrifice, and betrayal. The "subjects" become as saintly or wicked as the heroes or villains of biblical parables, with the mundane events of their lives becoming tales of pressure, deception, and heartbreak. Personalities have no nuance; gender, class, or racial hierarchies do not exist. Unpredictable or transgressive material (marriages that end in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

divorce, for example) is either suppressed, or treated as ammunition for later "surprising" plot twists, although early, unsuccessful marriages are included when their details are too well known to ignore.

The function of this kind of biopic is actually to "keep reality at bay," as Bill Nichols says of reality television (54). Viewer opinions are not changed; no consciousnesses are raised. Stock phrases, such as "one of the century's most popular performers," or "evil incarnate," slide past in unexamined innocence. Little more than promotional videos, these "documentaries" adopt the most superficial and "showbusiness-like" style of television "reporting." They are biographies that center, essentially, around absences.

## TRIUMPHING OVER ADVERSITY

In his analysis of the historical life on television, James Combs explains how the biographical formula "satisfies the schizophrenia in democratic societies about Great Men." The Great Man "must be the 'best of us' but also 'one of us,' a leader of great ability on the one hand but who is also clearly a 'man of the people' on the other." A&E Biography® lives certainly follow this pattern. Dean Martin's story, for example, begins by emphasizing his "ordinary" roots—"Dean's neighborhood was a tough one" (though little mention is made of any specific class or ethnic background). But the Great Man's "specialness" was also a Martin trait. "Dean was a leader, the man was a leader," says his friend Alan King. Martin's biography thus presents a stereotypical instance of how sociopolitical control of the masses often takes place at least in part through giving the public officially designated heroes. For, as Combs put it, "the notion of greatness implicit in democratic man still moves us."

By avoiding analysis of social or economic context, any "investigation" into a subject's "private life" necessarily turns into a discussion focused almost exclusively on "roots," "ordinariness," humanity, devotion to family, hobbies, children, great love for friends, and so on. Such narratives emphasize and perhaps even exaggerate the unpromising surroundings these "great men" spring from. Focusing on their struggles, their suffering, and their triumphs over adversity, their stories thus reconfirm the American democratic mythology about "great men" arising from the masses.

According to Bill Nichols, one of the primary characteristics that distinguishes documentary representation from fiction is an "adherence to the principles of rhetoric that govern the discourses of sobriety"—that is, discourses such as economics and medicine which attempt to represent the state of affairs in the historical or natural world (47). From this perspective,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

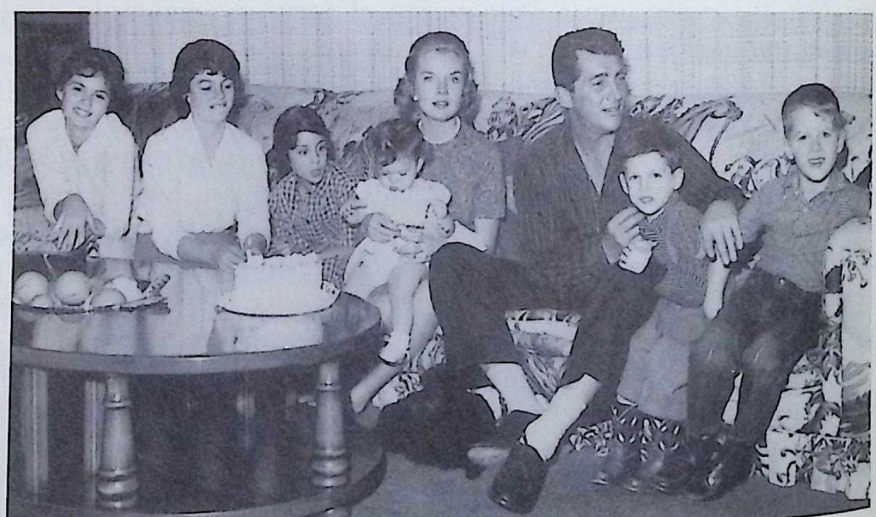
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the A&E Biography® is far closer to fiction than to documentary, because it avoids the "discourses of sobriety" and embraces narrative structures which offer an openly imaginative representation of the world.

## CELEBRITY SECRETS

Renewed interest in the Rat Pack after Sinatra's death also resulted in *The Rat Pack,* a recent HBO made-for-TV movie, starring Ray Liotta as Frank Sinatra.[3] This version did include some fairly explicit—though equally mythologized—references to Sinatra's involvement with Judy Campbell, John Kennedy, and Sam Giancana. Not so, however, the two longer A&E Rat Pack biographies, where the "boys" are never depicted as crossing the line between charming, good-natured chicanery and criminal behavior.

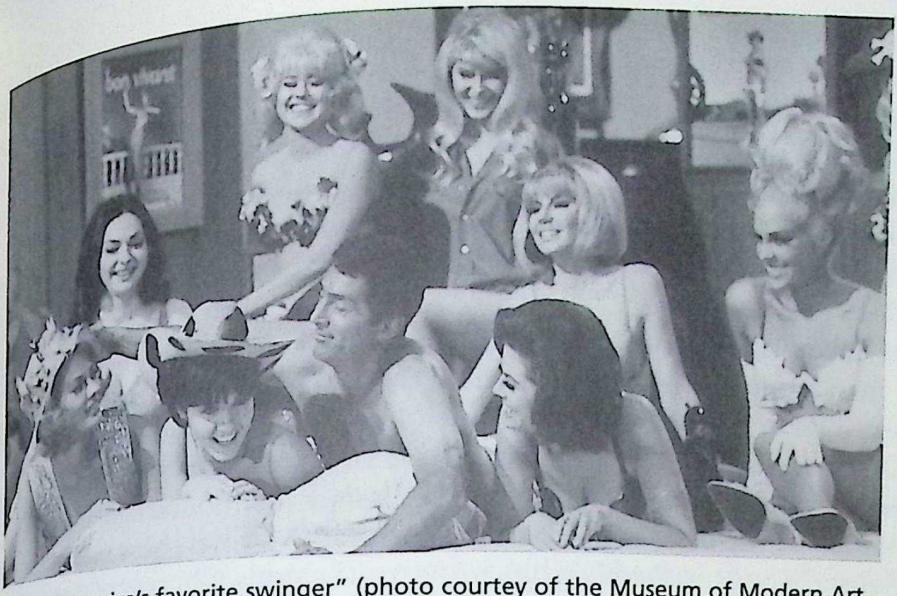
In its explicit effort to find a balance between the "public" and the "personal" life of its subject, the A&E Biography® exploits popular interest in the "private lives" of celebrities by purporting to allow us glimpses into their "personal secrets." In the telling, however, not only are no such secrets revealed, but widely known truths are glossed over, distorted, or denied. Alleged extramarital sexual activities, for example, which might compromise the subject's implicit "heroism" and "purity" are either brushed off or ignored, as part of an impulse to present the subjects as sexually—and by extension, domestically—"normal."



Dean as family man (photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



And as "America's favorite swinger" (photo courtey of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives).

In the case of Dean Martin, for instance, this well-known womanizer is presented as being blessed with a happy marriage to ex-beauty queen Jeannie, whose implicitly irrational jealousy is made into something of a joke. Greg Garrison, producer of the *Dean Martin Show,* explains how part of the show's structure was to surround Dean with a "bevy of beauties" called "the gold-diggers." "As a matter of fact, it caused a few problems, sometimes," laughs Garrison: "Jeannie would say, at dinner, 'who was that blonde who was paying you so much attention tonight?'"

In other biographies, however, Martin's friends and lovers suggest that the situation often wasn't all that funny. "Dean used to fuck every human he could," claims one source. "He was a bastard: all wine and candlelight, then a pat on the ass in the morning," claims another (Levy 199). In keeping with its own logic, however, the A&E Biography® fabricates and falsifies the truth by presenting Dino as a faithful, home-loving husband—sometimes with inadvertently comical consequences. "By 1964, Dean Martin was one of the biggest players in Hollywood," claims the voice-over, as a drunk-looking Martin works the stage, and "In private life, Dean was busy too. By then, Dean and Jeannie had seven children. Dean the swinger was a dedicated family man. He was always home for dinner." Cut to a rather irritated looking Jeannie sitting beside a swimming pool. "He was always home for dinner," she confirms, "He never reneged on *that.*"

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Similarly the A&E Biography® implies that Martin consciously chose to present himself as a playboy and a swinger. "He knew he looked like a guy who liked to lead the good life," claims the voice-over, "and he decided to make the most of it. Dean got paid for having fun. He was America's favorite swinger." However, the biography neglects to mention the well-documented fact that Martin's boozing evolved from a stage joke into the real thing, and was eventually supplemented by a Percodan addiction (Levy 304).

Like Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr. is made into a home-loving family man. When he first saw his future wife, May Britt, a white actress, he fell in love at first sight, and "he pursued her the way he pursued stardom—he never gave up." They marry, and have three children, giving Sammy "his chance finally to be a family." What is not mentioned are Davis's many marital infidelities, with such women as Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield, or his membership in Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, or his friendship with Mafia boss Sam Giancana, or his heavy gambling habit—at one stage, apparently, he had to make $17,000 a week just to break even (Levy 277). Even when mentioned, the breakup of his marriage to Britt comes as a light-hearted and affectionate afterthought ("if he couldn't be the best husband and father, he was determined to be the best Sammy Davis, Jr."). Nor do we hear almost anything of his well-testified drug and alcohol addictions—the joke was that Davis seemed to be the only person in America who *couldn't* remember where he was the day Kennedy was shot (Levy 260). What the viewer is left with is only that Davis had a "terror of growing old, but his fears were unfounded."

## INCONGRUITIES: GAPS AND DISJUNCTIONS

In the world that is the A&E Biography®, even very minor stars in the celebrity galaxy suddenly become dynamic characters, blessed with a "personal power." People are drawn to them, defer to them, respect them, love them. The subject's past is essentially constructed through internal narrative corroborations to provoke a conventional response, and to anticipate later developments in the life. Tropes and conventions from fiction and films, including voice-over narration, mood music, reconstructed events, and manipulated time sequences, create cohesive, engaging drama, but in the process often cover over the important issues that their very use should raise, including whether or not the gaps and revelations in the narrative result from agreements made with their subjects or their subjects' surviving families. Neither documentary nor fiction, this process is in essence a re-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

sculpting of reality. In addition to making heroes out of ordinary and sometimes quite inadequate men and women, and to creating some rather obvious omissions in a life story, this resculpting can also create some profound disjunctions and juxtapositions between explicit structure, themes, and attitudes, and implicit, perhaps even inadvertent, strategies, images, and dialogues.

Much is made, for example, of Dean Martin's legendary "dignity" and "aplomb." Yet the only interview footage used is of a seedy-looking Martin in his seventies, greasy and bloated-looking in a black-leather jacket, slurring his words drunkenly. "We didn't care about the audience," he says of his stage performances with Jerry Lewis, "We didn't look at the audience. We looked at each other." Here the fabled "dignity" and "aplomb" seem more like casual indifference. Other biographical sources testify how, in his later years, Dean lost respect for his audience altogether, swearing in Italian on network television, singing only three songs all the way through during a show in Las Vegas, or walking off movie sets because he felt like an ass playing a cowboy at his age (Levy 290). The A&E Biography® response is simple denial. "There were stories," claims the voice-over, "that Dean worked only one day a week so he could play golf the rest of the time. Truth is, he was busier than ever." And of course, no mention is made of Martin's notorious association with known Mafia criminals like Skinny D'Amato, the inevitable Sam Giancana, and Mack "Killer" Gray—Dean's procurer, bodyguard, and drug peddler.

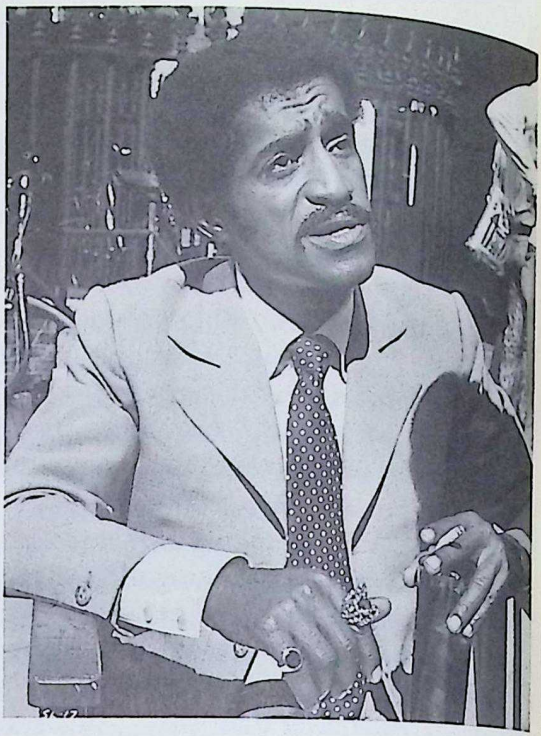
As for Sammy Davis Jr., his biographical treatment seems to suffer from a strange kind of schizophrenia whenever it comes to the issue of race. On the one hand, the show tells the story of showbusiness hypocrisy—of Davis being denied a dressing room at the Sands Casino in Las Vegas, of having to enter through the back door and take lodgings on the black side of town, away from his friends. "For all his success," we're told, "Sammy still hadn't escaped prejudice." On the other hand, the program also blurs politics and showbusiness by telling a second story of the victory of talent and friendship over narrow-minded racism and bigotry, as Davis "broke down racial barriers at every stop along the way." "In Vegas," we learn, Davis "broke the long-standing color ban," apparently because "showfolk don't care about color" and "the best way to break down barriers" for Sammy was "through his talent."

A great deal is also made of his relationship with Frank Sinatra, who apparently referred to Davis as "my brother." In a late interview, Davis, sitting on a sofa smoking a cigarette, tells the interviewer that Frank was "one of the nicest human beings I've ever met in my life." Davis explains his

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

affection by telling the interviewer that "Frank's always finding little games to play, like, let's punch someone out, something like that." According to a producer, Sinatra "was the barometer for which Sammy shone." And according to the A&E Biography®, "Sammy was so loyal to Frank that he even postponed his wedding [to May Britt] until after the Kennedy election." (Not only were the Kennedy's "heroes to him," claims the voice-over, "they were friends.") What is not mentioned is that the Britt-Davis wedding was postponed only reluctantly, and in response to Davis's terror of Sinatra. Nor does the documentary mention that many of Sinatra's jokes were made at Davis's expense, and often with a racist undertone. In fact, Britt refused to visit her husband on the set of *Robin and the Seven Hoods* because she was so tired of seeing him mocked and belittled by Sinatra, who always referred to him as "the kid" (Levy 167–70, 274).



© 1970 United Artists Corporation. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

Nor apparently was Davis always so fond of Sinatra. In his recent book *Rat Pack Confidential,* Shawn Levy recounts an anecdote about Ed Olsen, who as chairman of the Nevada Gaming Commission had had the courage to revoke Sinatra's license to invest in Nevada hotels, casinos, or gaming interests, because of his behavior and his connection with Giancana and his cohorts. According to Levy, Davis took Olsen quietly aside to tell him, in many of the same four-letter words that Sinatra had used, what a great thing Olsen had done:

> Olsen thought Sammy must have been drunk, then, realizing that the singer had just finished his show and was stone sober, he relaxed and let him continue: "That little son of a bitch," Sammy told the commissioner, who was not beaming. "He's needed this for years. I've been working with him for sixteen years and nobody's ever had the guts to stand up to him." (253)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## HISTORICAL SURPRISES

Though presenting themselves as narratives of coherence and resolution, the A&E Biographies® are therefore in fact full of incommensurate juxtapositions, local gaps, distortions, incompatibilities, and pieces of contradictory "information." Indeed, some of the most inadvertently interesting scenes in the series are those which unconsciously question the elusive border between fact and fiction. Paula Rabinowitz explains how documentary films "speak about themselves as contradictory texts." Full of self-doubt about their status as organs of truth and reality, "the films and their criticism unravel like so much celluloid on the cutting room floor, revealing both productive and problematic sites for historical inquiry" (23). According to Rabinowitz, the implicit meaning of documentary is not simply to record but to change the world—"to evince material effects through representation"—and to do so through highly personal interventions into public life (102). A&E Biography® operates differently. Here audience attention is invariably diverted away from the realities of gender, racial, and economic struggles in favor of the formulaic, mythic structures and familiar narrative paradigms of the lives of celebrity entertainers.

Instead of telling the truth about the Rat Pack, this fascinating and complicated group of men, the A&E Biography® series employs a kind of detached duplicity to make them into a group of one-dimensional heroes—a team of venerated "great men" about whom only great things can be said, men for whom we ought to feel nothing but profound respect. Greg Garrison calls Dean Martin "the sweetest, kindest, most gentle human being I ever met in all my life." A miserable looking Jerry Lewis adds that "we had a genius in our midst, unrecognized, unfulfilled." In his A&E Biography® Sammy Davis Jr., becomes "the world's greatest entertainer. He was showbusiness." "There was only place where Sammy Davis, Jr., felt comfortable—on stage, entertaining people as only he could," the voice-over informs us: "He could do everything. Showbusiness was his life." "Sammy was one of a kind," claims Jesse Jackson at the funeral of "Mr. Entertainment." And yet the A&E depiction makes Sammy Davis Jr. seem remarkably similar to every one of their heroic subjects.

So what does all this mean, and how is it symptomatic of the way contemporary society seems to be reconstructing its position on celebrity? These "biographies" are, in essence, simply more examples of self-congratulatory media-packaged entertainment—thoughtless, depoliticized and simplified treatments which fail to interrogate their own narrational position in the mechanisms of commodification. They speak to a widely and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

deeply held fascination with celebrity, but offer precious little new understanding of this fascination.

William Cohn has noted that "historical surprises are not part of the audience expectations which influence the shape and character of historical documentary presentations" (283). Yet the A&E Biography® series is full of historical surprises—surprising omissions, a surprising indulgence in mass fantasy, and some surprising liberties with historical truths. This series remakes the past in the light of our more conservative, present cultural climate, which seems to have a need for unsullied heroes, possibly even saints. It seems unclear whether these glossy over-simplifications are motivated by assumptions about what audiences really want to see, or by a nostalgia for an earlier, far less cynical style of celebrity watching. Either way, it seems obvious that this series of popular biographies has far more to tell us about the present, which produces and consumes them, than about the celebrity subjects they purport to expose and explore.

## NOTES

1. Rock Hudson apparently began his career by hanging around outside studio gates for hours at a time, waiting to be "noticed" by some movie producer. "Believe it or not," he said, years later, "I was so naive I really did think that those stories about people being discovered were true. It may sound foolish, but that's what I did, and nothing happened" (Parker 13).
2. See Tedesco "A&E Writes" and "A&E Family" for information on the web site, and Stephens for the book series.
3. Apparently a full-length feature film about the Rat Pack is also currently in the works, starring, in a monumentally uninspired piece of casting, Tom Hanks as Frank Sinatra.

## WORKS CITED

Anger, Kenneth. *Hollywood Babylon.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

Balazs, Bela. *Theory of the Film.* New York: Ayer, 1972.

Boorstin, Daniel. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America.* New York: Atheneum, 1980.

Cohn, William H. "History for the Masses: Television Portrays the Past." *Journal of Popular Culture* 10 (Fall 1976): 280–89.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Combs, James. "Television Aesthetics and the Depiction of Heroism: The Case of the Television Historical Biography." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 8.2 (Summer 1980): 9–18.

Durgnat, Raymond. *Films and Feelings.* Cambridge: MIT UP, 1971.

Dyer, Richard. *Stars.* London: BFI, 1979.

Levy, Shawn. *Rat Pack Confidential.* New York: Doubleday, 1998.

Macdonald, Kevin, and Mark Cousins. *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of the Documentary.* London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

Nichols, Bill. *Blurring Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Parker, John. *Fire for Hollywood.* New York: Carol, 1989.

"Questions for Jay McInerney." *New York Times Magazine,* Jan. 24, 1999: 11.

Rabinowitz, Paula. *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary.* London: Verso, 1994.

Stephens, Francine. "A&E Biography Finally Gets Booked." *Publishers Weekly,* May 16, 1997: 24.

Tedesco, Richard. "A&E Family Channel Revamp Sites." *Broadcasting and Cable* 127.32 (Aug. 4, 1997): 53.

———. "A&E Writes 'Biography' Page." *Broadcasting and Cable* 126.29 (July 8, 1996): 40.

Walker, Alexander. *Stardom.* London: Joseph, 1970.

Wilkerson, Tichi, and Marcia Borie. *The Hollywood Reporter—The Golden Years.* New York: Coward-McCann, 1984.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# FILM AND VIDEO SELF-BIOGRAPHIES

AUDREY LEVASSEUR

Biography is a multimedia genre; it exists in oral, written, and audiovisual forms. Since the late 1960s, a sizable corpus of biographical films and videos has steadily grown, spurred by the popularity of television documentaries about celebrity subjects. The most familiar example of cinematic biography, what I term "traditional," typically celebrates the accomplishments of the subject in a chronological structure using photographic stills, film footage, and accounts of contemporaries or experts, with a narrator providing voice-over bridging commentary. Increasingly, directors are inserting sequences of dramatic reconstructions as well. Subgenres of cinematic biography include the *biographical sketch,* a brief account of a subject's life, focusing on factors that contributed to the subject's present state; *self-biographies,* hybrid forms combining traits of biography and autobiography; *investigative biographies,* works that examine the guilt or innocence of the subject, or attempt to get at the truth of some inquiry; *biographical concert performances,* a specialized form that captures a star's experiences during a concert tour; *ethnographic films and videos,* works that seek to document the culture of a specific geographic or cultural region; *mixed or hybrid forms,* newly evolving formats that combine the characteristics of two or more genres or subgenres, such as autobiography, investigative biography, and self-biography; *biographical docudrama,* biopics that use performers and recreations to simulate actual people and events; and *moc docs,* which are "documentary parodies, fake documentaries, and invented biographies and autobiographies" (Muhammad 36).

This essay defines the concept of a performing identity, and examines how a subject deploys this public identity in the subgenre of self-biography. I will evaluate the effect of the subject's performance and sense of celebrity on the director and on the final product of the cinematic self-biography.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The director's control of the complexity of the biographical treatment will also be examined. My purpose in scrutinizing both an early example of this subgenre and recent developments in the form is to clarify important features and to call attention to the subgenre's potential to produce very contrived life stories.

I have chosen to focus on this subgenre because it raises performance and ethical issues that distinguish cinematic biography from written biography. Written and cinematic biographers confront different challenges, and work by somewhat different standards, because of the nature of the media they employ. Cinematic biographies, for example, are collaborative works, making the question "Whose text is this?" a debatable issue. Moreover, the time limitations of a visual medium preempt the depth of analysis found in a literary biography. Directors of cinematic biographies, therefore, need to resist the temptation to simplify the narrative by resorting to stereotyping for economy of presentation and mass audience appeal. Further, because of the technological naiveté of many non-celebrity subjects, directors may be tempted to objectify the subject, or to violate in other ways the ethical parameters of the genre, to be more competitive in the market place.

## THE PERFORMING IDENTITY

If, as Linda Wagner-Martin suggests, written biography can in a certain sense be described as "the enactment of cultural performance" (8), cinematic biography relies on performance to an even greater extent.[1] The presence of a camera in a documentary production sets up a frame, keying a performance. Although cinematic biographies of necessity achieve less in-depth coverage of a subject's life course than is achieved by biographers in written works, this limitation is often offset by the actual participation of the subject. Moreover, in cinematic biography the documentarist often contextualizes the subject—through interviews with family, friends, colleagues, and critics, and through collaborative vérité sequences, such as group discussions. These interviewees are also performing; thus the subject's performance is situated within a web of other performances.

In written biography, "the biographer must accept or reject a subject's self-definition" (Wagner-Martin 8). In cinematic biography where the live subject participates in the documentary, his or her self-definition, conveyed through performance, is a key aspect of the documentary. The director evaluates and comments on the subject's self-definition indirectly through directorial choices such as editing, framing, selection of interviewees, and so forth.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Complicating the subject's participation in the biographical documentary is his or her use of a performing identity. The performing identity is the public persona—that is, the created persona, an artifact turned out with calculated artistry. In short, the performing identity is the result of the techniques that people use to manage the information they convey about themselves to others. The performing identity differs from the social identity, which consists of the personal attributes that others assign to us based on their initial assessment of our appearance and personal and structural attributes (Goffman, *Stigma* 2). It contrasts as well with the personal identity, which is the "positive marks or identity pegs and the unique combination of life history items that comes to be attached to the individual with the help of these pegs for his [or her] identity" (Goffman, *Stigma* 57).

The performing identity arises from an individual's heightened consciousness of role playing in the public sphere. From an early age, children play at make believe. As they grow older, they learn how to be social actors, pretending, for example, to like a gift to please a favorite aunt. And for many other reasons—to make a good impression, please the boss, avoid embarrassing situations—adults carry the process of social acting in public life even further.

Actors and celebrities quickly develop an awareness of what roles play well with what audiences and in what cultures, and assume and cultivate these parts, using specific codes and costumes. When professional actors adopt a role or bit of business into their public life and repeat it for a calculated effect, they are employing the performing identity. Minorities, because of their position as outsiders in society, also develop a keen sense of performing identity. This is especially true of gays, who have been forced to lead double lives and to adopt performance techniques and dress codes within communities to communicate with other gays, and to control stigma. Though less attuned and practiced than actors, celebrities, and minorities, most individuals in our media-obsessed age have a certain awareness of the roles they play and the effect of these roles on managing situations and maintaining status.

## PERFORMANCE IN SELF-BIOGRAPHY

The inclination toward greater experimentation in written and cinematic auto/biographies, the impact of the television documentary, and the postmodern tendency to blur generic boundaries have resulted in an increasing hybridization of auto/biographical forms. Self-biography is one such hybrid. While the term has been used by such writers as Clark Blaise to indicate

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

"autobiographies' of film stars, generals, and politicians, which are really ghost-written self-biographies" (201), it also describes film and video biographies whose subjects exert significant control over the content and tone of the biography, but who do not direct, edit, or perform the technical aspects of its production.

Unlike autobiography, which Clark Blaise has called a "denial of celebrity," self-biography honors accomplishments (210). "In a biography, we plot the growth of the biographee's awareness and power," Blaise explains, "In autobiography, we celebrate the opposite: the consistency of character through disparate experience, the birth and permanence of consciousness; in a word, selfhood" (203). Autobiography contrasts with a film portrait as well because a portrait does not try to encompass the full arc of a person's life, is not typically structured chronologically, and is more focused on the present.[2] Many self-biographies do follow chronological order, the classical model of biography, but unlike biographies, they do not end with the death of the subject. Rather, they are open and unfinished—like autobiographies.

The degree of participation by the subject is the most distinctive feature of this hybrid. Unlike biography, where the subject is present only in photographic stills, family movies, archival film footage, and excerpts from past writings, in self-biography the subject's most powerful instruments are his or her performing identity and present self-performance. Not only is the subject thus able directly to influence audience perceptions, but by controlling access to family, friends, and vital records, he or she may indirectly influence the style of the director's presentation as well. The overall effect of self-biography may be more univocal than multivocal, leading some critics to complain that the effect of the work is a canonization or hagiography that lacks depth of analysis.

A univocal presentation is more likely if the subject is a well-known public figure with a developed sense of celebrity, and the power both to authorize and to control biographical projects.[3] A dominant viewpoint is established primarily through the subject's commentary, restricted directorial choices, and a selective array of commentators. Opposing or critical viewpoints tend not to be presented (see Corner 23).

Writers of biographies of live subjects often suffer similar problems—hostility and lack of access to important documents and sources—that biographers of dead subjects do not have to deal with. In "When Writers Wish their Subjects Were Dead," Janny Scott enumerates the difficulties of "the unauthorized biographer's burden": "There is a living purgatory inhabited by biographers who dare to write about famous people who are

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

neither consenting nor dead." Scott quotes one such biographer, Carl Rollyson, who with his wife chose to do a biography of Susan Sontag. Rollyson observes that "biography is all about exposure." Problems arise, however, when biographers interpret subjects in ways that go against their prevailing self-constructions, since the subjects create "these images of themselves" and "seem to feel entitled to project this as history." The ultimate threat for biographers of both media forms is that they can be sued for defamation by a live subject. Dead subjects cannot sue.

To delineate this hybrid form with greater precision, I will examine an early example of celebrity self-biography, *Sartre par lui-même* [*Sartre by Himself*] (1976), and then will briefly investigate three other celebrity self-biographies: *Simone de Beauvoir* (1982), *The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg* (1993), and *Marlene* (1984). In the final section of this essay, I will discuss non-celebrity self-biography, such as Alan Berliner's *Nobody's Business* (1996).

* * * * *

*Sartre par lui-même* is a three-hour-and-ten-minute work directed by Michel Contat and Alexandre Astruc; *Simone de Beauvoir* is a similar biographical project directed by Josée Dayan and Malka Ribowska. Sartre and de Beauvoir chose to make these films for several reasons. Sartre saw film as a vehicle for reaching a larger and somewhat different audience than his written works appealed to, and astutely recognized the political impact of the new medium. In addition, Sartre had a more personal reason for embracing this medium.[4] By 1972, when the film was being shot, he was suffering from near blindness. No longer able to write, he was consequently forced to use the artistic form of expression he was then best able to perform: dialogue (Honigsblum 127). For her part, de Beauvoir's cited reasons for utilizing this medium are vanity and a desire to rectify mistaken notions others might have about her, relying on film's so-called objective presentation and ability to capture physical presence.[5]

Classifying *Sartre par lui-même* has challenged both film and literary critics. In a 1982 *New York Times* article, Vincent Canby labeled it "a 'talking heads' movie" and "a chronological, aural autobiography," although the article's headline identified it as a self-portrait (32). Walter Goodman, in a 1987 *New York Times* article, called it a monologue (22). In a review entitled "*Sartre by Himself:* Film as Biography and Autobiography," Gerald Honigsblum asserts that the film is "a curious mix of biography and autobiography" (123). Finally, in an article he wrote twelve years after co-directing the film, Michel Contat argues that, strictly speaking, it is neither

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

a filmed autobiography nor biography (1160), labeling it instead an epitext on *The Words* (1964), Sartre's written autobiography. The difficulty with categorizing this film is that it is a hybrid form, an oral autobiography documented on film. Though Sartre controlled his self-performance and his dialogue, codirectors Contat and Alexandre Astruc conceived of its overall style and structure, Astruc operated the camera (and thus the camera angles and compositions), and Annie Chevally performed the editing.

What is the result of this effort in terms of film art, autobiography, and documentary theory? First, as noted by Honigsblum, the documentary has the "look of a low budget film, with a camera and crude recording equipment competing for space in Sartre's living room" (124). (In fact, with its two-camera set-up, the production values are not bad. Rather, because of its length, intimate setting, and montage sequences used to establish a chronological structure, it has the look of a television documentary.) Though unpretentious in terms of cinematic production, technique, and visual interest, it is remarkable for Sartre's self-performance. As Sartre himself noted, "It is possible that this is more interesting in terms of knowing me because it is totally spontaneous."[6] Sartre's film performance is indeed less studied than his narrative performance in his written autobiography *The Words*. Honigsblum encapsulates the impact of the two media on the autobiographical projects when he observes that,

> If *Sartre by Himself* can be considered, as it has been by many, a sequel to *The Words*, it is not because one picks up where the other leaves off, but rather because the medium itself promotes the immediacy of the "performing" Sartre as an alternative to the fictionalized Sartre. (125)

As Sartre explains in the film, his published autobiography had a different context. First, it was written to explore his literary neurosis; second, it is a work of art, "written so that people would criticize literature." The film chronicles "the path of an intellectual born in 1905 up to today, 1972." As "a unique documentation of one of this century's best-known thinkers," the film is particularly valuable "for its archival value in that it preserves the only significant visual and oral/aural account of Jean-Paul Sartre" (Honigsblum 125). And as mentioned above, it also stands as the only sequel to Sartre's written autobiography.

A second major effect of Sartre's participation and celebrity status is that the film is more univocal than multivocal. The respectful presentation by the two directors, the use of the Sartre "rat pack" of friends and colleagues as questioners and audience stand-ins, and the absence of more astringent interviewers result in a worshipful presentation and tone[7]—so

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

much so that autobiography theorist Philippe Lejeune complains in *Je est un autre* that the film is a hagiography verging on parody (192–93).

Directors collaborating closely with celebrity subjects on biographical projects thus clearly run the risk not only of idealizing their subjects because they are awed by their celebrity, but also of refusing to pose certain questions or to use potentially embarrassing, but factual, material in order to secure their cooperation. Economic pressures and/or lack of experience can also result in an overly rosy treatment. Contat, for example, later admitted that he lacked the necessary experience and cinematic models to make the film autobiography that he had envisioned (1184). And here, the subject's own inexperience has its effect. Though skilled communicators in their chosen media, subjects like Sartre are usually relatively unskilled in constructing and producing documentary projects, and must therefore depend on the technical expertise and good judgment of their director(s). Sartre had to rely on Astruc and Contat to craft a visual and aural style, to structure and edit the documentary, and to oversee technical concerns such as properly miking him so that the sound quality was not muddy. Sartre also delegated his right of final cut to Contat, who was responsible for the film's final form (1184). This arrangement led to some ambiguities. When asked during the preparation of press materials if he thought the film was Sartre's film or a film about Sartre, Contat, who actually thought it more biography than autobiography (because Sartre could not authorize himself to be the focalizer or "I" of the film [1185]), nevertheless replied "Les deux à la fois" [Both] (1185, 1184). But when Sartre heard this, he asked Contat to revise his statement to say that it was a film *about* Sartre. And yet, despite this disclaimer, both Sartre and Contat share responsibility and creative coauthorship of the film. First, "authorship" works differently in the film medium. Sartre never could have had the artistic control over this film that he had with his books. Not only are films collaborative projects, but any creative project made for mass distribution is subject to the contingencies of the marketplace—such as funding sources. Nevertheless, Sartre's self-presentation and oral performance dominate the film, and he made decisions that shaped the final product, such as choosing the directors, vetoing the participation of certain interviewers, and vesting Contat with the authority for the final cut.

* * * * *

Simone de Beauvoir's self-biography is similar in content and effect to Sartre's. The two films share many topics: the love of reading, the process by which the subject became a writer, the discussion of written works and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

important ideas, and even accounts of the subjects' first meeting and subsequent courtship. Many of the same photographic stills and archival film clips appear in both films. Structured chronologically, through montage sequences both films attempt to place life events in a historical context, and through close-ups, both document biological performance—the physical display of an involuntary process—with the later film emphasizing Sartre's aging and physical deterioration.[8]

Though such similarities are frequent, I will concentrate on what distinguishes the films from each other. For instance, while *Sartre* is mostly set in Sartre's and de Beauvoir's apartments, the de Beauvoir film feels less claustrophobic and is more visually interesting because it uses different settings and more photographic stills and film footage. Although the introduced archival footage is not always strongly illustrative of the historical scene being described, it does break up the talking-heads set-up, and helps to establish a sense of de Beauvoir at different periods of her life. In the de Beauvoir interviews, however, the camera work remains fairly static, with the one camera panning back and forth between discussants. The sound track is technically deficient as well. In some segments the ambient sound is distracting. Also de Beauvoir speaks so quickly that the dialogue is difficult to follow, and the subtitles can hardly keep pace—in addition to frequently being difficult to read because the background is too light to contrast with the white letters.

In general, the de Beauvoir film feels less protective of its subject. With Sartre answering questions posed by a circle of friends, *Sartre par lui-même* seems in essence like a monologue. Though equally an oral autobiography documented on film, *Simone de Beauvoir* is structured as a series of interviews or staged dialogues, with the subject's own narration providing much of the bridging commentary. Some of De Beauvoir's interviewers are noticeably less worshipful than Sartre's. A few of her sister's questions and comments raise some painful issues, such as de Beauvoir's cruel streak and their father's cavalier treatment of her. Alice Schwartzer quizzes de Beauvoir about Sartre's and her own polygamy, and the difficulties of dealing with a third party in relationships. And yet, these break-out moments are largely contained by the well-rehearsed accounts which dominate the film. This practiced quality is especially true of de Beauvoir's extended interview with Sartre—in which she speaks of her life as a writer and of her experiences during the war—and in her segments with lifelong intimates Colette Audrey, Olga Bost, and Jacques Laurent Bost. Even Andrée Michel, the sociologist brought in to comment on the impact of de Beauvoir's ideas and actions, is unfailingly complimentary. This restraint is all the more striking,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

because the challenging and personal questions posed in the film's opening and closing segments by film director Claude Lanzmann hint at what might have been. Had his experience as a director in drawing out and challenging subjects been more evident in *Simone de Beauvoir,* the film's overall effect might have been quite different.

De Beauvoir's self-biography is nevertheless valuable as a document of her self-performance, her interactions with key people in her life, and her views on many topics important to students and readers of her works. We hear de Beauvoir's hurried speech, and witness her brusque manner. By reading her body language, we sense her inner strength. But codirectors' Josée Dayan's and Malka Ribowska's kid-glove treatment, the decision to include mostly de Beauvoir intimates, and the subject's extensive participation limit the range of viewpoints the film presents. This is a danger inherent in cinematic, collaborative biographical forms. Perhaps because it might make their subjects seem less heroic, the filmmakers often stint on contextualizing the subjects in the skein of forces that define their times. Complexities, flaws, and inconsistencies of the subject's character are understated, and discordant voices that trouble the familiar ways that the subject has come to view, think about, or narrate his or her life often remain unheard. The critical time constraints of audiovisual forms often contribute to such results. In so restricted a medium, it is tempting to omit painful details, and to emplot a life simply as a success story.

* * * * *

The director of a self-biography must also deal in some way with the subject's control over access to crucial materials. The filmmaker is usually indebted to the subject not only for the use of such items as personal photographs and objects, or family films, but for access as well to family, friends, private homes, and so forth. In this regard, *The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg* (1994) provides some good markers for assessing the degree of subject-participation needed for a film to be considered a self-biography. Ginsberg "shared personal material not made public before" with director Jerry Aronson (Stack). Ginsberg also generously supplied interviews, readings of his poetry, and bridging commentary. For the concluding segment of the film, he shared a lifetime of photographic stills of his beat generation family and others. When these contributions are added to his permission to use archival performance footage from such television shows as William F. Buckley Jr.'s *Firing Line* and *The Dick Cavett Show,* and from such films as *Don't Look Back,* Ginsberg's extensive contributions fully entitle him to being credited as Aronson's creative partner in his biographical project. But

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Aronson's indebtedness apparently goes even further. According to Calvin Ahlgren, Ginsberg's influence provided Aronson with "the boost to finish the film after working on it for so long." Ginsberg not only "tipped Aronson to a Japanese funding source that paid for final work," but by allowing Aronson to use his name, Ginsberg also "opened doors to sales of French television rights." Such generosity has its down side, however, for as critics have pointed out, Aronson's friendship with and indebtedness to Ginsberg resulted in a documentary that is more affectionate than probing (Denerstein).

* * * * *

Does the close collaborative relationship between the subject and director found in celebrity self-biographies always result in overly positive treatment? Not necessarily. Maximilian Schell's *Marlene* provides a case in point. The film differs in several major respects from the previously discussed self-biographies. First, Dietrich's self-biography has conflict, passion. A disagreement with advantageous consequences developed between Dietrich and the director, in part because Dietrich refused to let herself, her apartment, or personal objects be filmed, and in part because Dietrich and Schell had different conceptions of the documentary. Marlene wanted to do a conventional television documentary on her career, while Schell wanted to do a feature film on the person, not the legend (Bach 457). Lacking permission to photograph the aging star, Schell was forced to use his imagination for the visuals. The challenge resulted in some stylistic innovations, such as the use of recreations—staged shots of Dietrich doubles on a constructed set of her apartment built on a sound stage—and shots of the filmmaking equipment, the film crew, and the filming and editing process. "What is real?" Schell asks in an early sequence of the film, and the question reverberates on many levels, interrogating the very status of documentary biography, and ultimately spawning a self-reflexive work that is multivocal. By foregrounding the filming process, Schell suggests that only the most literal aspects of the process, such as editing and recording a sound track, are "real."

In style, the film is part compilation film, a "synthetic documentary," in which all sorts of materials recorded earlier are edited together to form a new work (Ellis 36). Pioneered by Esfir Shub, this type of film depends on editing extant material, which in this case consisted principally of clips from Dietrich's most famous films, photographic stills, newsreel footage of the star, shots of the filming process and sound recording equipment, and recreations. The previously discussed self-biographies also use archival

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

materials, but not to the extent that Schell's film does, because Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Ginsberg agreed to be filmed, and their visual self-performances are key assets of their documentaries. Ironically, while Schell was editing clips in such a way as to comment on the public persona and Dietrich legend, the much photographed Marlene "gave herself greater presence by not being seen" (Bach 464).

Ultimately the conflict between Schell and Dietrich became the defining element of the film, encouraging him to take risks to provoke the star to reveal more than received views of the legend. For example, Schell walked out on Dietrich during a taping session in order to get a reaction and ultimately more cooperation from her (Bach 460). He got what he wanted: the spirit with which Dietrich chided Schell for his "temper tantrum" demonstrated her feisty temper, star ego, and sense of professionalism. Schell also used trickery, keeping the tape recorders out of view in the apartment's entryway so that he could tape her more relaxed, unedited remarks, uttered when she thought the recorders were turned off (Bach 455). He theatricalized his own performance to highlight the star-versus-director conflict. He built a studio set of her apartment to stage shots of the technicians' lurking at the portals of the star's inner sanctum, underscoring Dietrich's exclusiveness, so that the audience would share the director's frustration with Dietrich's prohibition on filming her or her things.

A second difference between *Marlene* and the other self-biographies is that while the directors of *Sartre, de Beauvoir,* and *Ginsberg* remain mostly off-camera, or relegate themselves to minor onscreen roles, Schell becomes a major character through his onscreen visual and aural presence. "He put himself in it (he is the subtext: This film is a duel, not a duet)," Bach asserts, "We see him heaping his head with film, torturing himself with his failure to root out the reality of Marlene" (464). We encounter Schell in his great dramatic role of defense attorney in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1962). We hear him in the voice-over cajoling, questioning, and finally arguing with Dietrich. This onscreen presence strengthens Schell's textual voice, endowing him with more control and authority to disagree with Dietrich, and to pursue his own agendas in the film.

A filmmaker exerts his governing presence through the film's textual voice, defined by Bill Nichols as "that which conveys to us a sense of the text's social point of view, of how it is speaking to us" (260). This voice is comprised of all the director's decisions behind the camera—shot selection, framing, editing, and so on—and his visual and aural onscreen presence. With a star of Dietrich's stature, Schell needed to concoct a strong textual voice. As previously stated, to do this he went so far as to create his own

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

on-screen character, the director, who is not a mere interviewer but Dietrich's equal, discoursing with her about her films.

Schell also distinguished himself from the previously discussed directors by avoiding a chronological structure (which he felt was boring), adopting an investigative posture toward his subject, and using ironic not reverential tones and self-reflexive questioning of generic conventions. Schell's critical stance toward his subject, and toward biography's generic conventions, enabled him to challenge Dietrich's performing identity and oral self-presentation, and to fashion a more multivocal text that foregrounds the creative, subjective aspects of the genre.

* * * * *

We need greater critical precision when discussing and analyzing subjective non-fiction films, and especially popular auto/biographical films and videos produced in collaboration with live subjects. Examining these films reveals that a subject's sense of celebrity can both authorize biographical projects and produce an imbalance of power in the collaboration, which may result in a univocal presentation. To avoid this, the director must go beneath the surface—beyond the legends and the received interpretations. As I have suggested, letting associates long familiar with Sartre's story and history discourse with him made the film seem a sanitized tribute. And the omission from Ginsberg's self-biography of an interview with Peter Orlovsky, his lifelong companion, robs the viewer of an important perspective. On the positive side, the self-performance of the subject in a self-biography can help balance the director's unconscious biases that might influence the biographical presentation—the case in *Marlene*—though this may be more characteristic of non-celebrity self-biography than of celebrity self-biographies.

## NON-CELEBRITY SELF-BIOGRAPHY

Having detailed some of the challenges of celebrity self-biography, I will conclude by examining non-celebrity self-biography. Alan Berliner's *Nobody's Business* is both a prototypical and anomalous non-celebrity self-biography. It is typical in that (1) the control of the point of view primarily rests in the hands of a filmmaker/director (who is often related to the subject); (2) the subject's control is exercised chiefly through his or her performing identity and self-performance; (3) the biography of the subject is validated by demonstrating thematic connections to larger issues; (4) the self-biography treads the fine line between exploitation and tribute, and (5) the film has a home-movie quality. These characteristics are shared by such

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

other non-celebrity self-biographies as Jonathan Demme's *Cousin Bobby* (1992), about Demme's cousin, Rev. Robert Castle, and his fight against society's racism, urban poverty, and governmental neglect; Steven Bognar's *Personal Belongings* (1996), about his immigrant father's search for identity; and Jessica Yu's *Breathing Lessons: The Life and Work of Mark O'Brien* (1996), about a disabled writer. Berliner's *Nobody's Business* is unusual in that (1) its subject, Berliner's father, Oscar, is at least on a conscious level an unwilling collaborator in the project, and (2) the documentary's progressive scope—its assertion that every life has meaning, and its validation of the importance of family history as a connecting tissue that unites all humans—has broader implications than do many personal documentaries.

Alan Berliner principally controls the point of view because he controls the camera, the interviews, and the stylistic elements, such as framing, shot selection, editing, pace, sound effects, graphics, and so forth. He also marks the film as more his project than his father's through a unique visual style, which includes his use of archival boxing footage of the 1923 Dempsey-Firpo fight to evoke the dramatic tension between him and his father; his manipulation of camera effects, such as fast forward, slow motion, and the use of outsized words; and his desire to make a film on family history even though Oscar has no interest in the subject. But Oscar's performing identity, and his scrappy orneriness, as well as the extensive use of family movies and photographs taken by and featuring Oscar, invoke a particularity of self-perception which makes this his film as well as Alan's. As with so many personal documentaries, the subject's on-camera presence and naturalness make him an engaging character. Oscar's power resides in his refusal to answer questions that he prefers not to answer, his stinging criticism of his son's choice of profession, and his rejection of Alan's belief in the importance of family history and human connectedness.

The major themes of this personal film emerge from the immigrant experience and the family's connection to its history. In a complete break with his European family, Alan's immigrant grandfather wanted to forget the old life and forge a new history. As a first-generation American, Alan's father claims to have no awareness of, or curiosity about, the family history. In contrast, Alan, a second-generation American, foregrounds the importance of the whole question of human connectedness through his genealogical research. This research not only has implications for intergenerational communication, but for all human interactions as well. "Whether they are alive or dead, our parents send us messages about life," Berliner declares, and "consciously or unconsciously those messages become a part of who we are." This move—validating interest in the life of a non-celebrity

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

by demonstrating its broader implications—is common in non-celebrity biography.

*Nobody's Business* is more multivocal than univocal due to the dramatic tension between the son/director and father/subject.[9] Like Schell and Dietrich in *Marlene,* Alan's and Oscar's conflict causes both of them to reveal more of their inner demons and critical astuteness than would ordinarily be the case. And as in *Marlene,* the director has a considerable onscreen visual and aural presence that reveals his agendas and points of view. Their arguments not only provide the soundtrack to the family movies and scrapbook pictures, but also stage the debate on the importance of family history and the uniqueness of each human life. The film also raises the issue of when exactly exploration becomes exploitation. Is it right for Alan to lay bare his father's painful relationship with his ex-wife, and his lonely, painful twilight years? The son's filming of Oscar's daily routine borders on voyeurism, graphically exposing the rigid, barren patterns that enable him to negotiate the loneliness and emptiness of his everyday existence, and the desperate pain of his isolation.

On balance, however, *Nobody's Business* establishes that its subject has a story worth telling. This non-celebrity self-biography also illustrates some of the difficulties the subject has in maintaining the balance of power with the director, and reveals the operations of culture and society on the individual. The film also demonstrates that the collaborative process of self-biography enables those whose lives do not fit the conventional archetypes of autobiographical heroes to tell their stories. And finally, hybrid forms, like non-celebrity self-biographies, trouble existing boundaries and cast new light on generic forms.

* * * * *

Making a multivocal self-biography involves doing painstaking research, choosing interviewees carefully, asking hard questions of them and of the subject, striking the ironic note or troubling the accepted version, and opting for creative filming or video styles. The visual interest of these films should not be sacrificed to talking-heads presentation. To convey the inner reality of the subject, the filmmaker must resort to a greater openness to experimentation with fictional techniques, such as dramatic recreations, metaphoric flashback scenes, fantasy sequences, outlandish imagery, and spirit drawings. Highly scripted self-biographies that exclude alternative viewpoints, or accent career accomplishments at the expense of the personal, produce very "packaged" life stories. When, for example, PBS launched a "First Person Singular" series of films, a reviewer billed the results as

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

works "designed to trace introspectively the lives of notable Americans." What the series offered instead was a rather impersonal view of the subject's career, narrated in voice-over and annotated by the subject's comments. But with the growing popularity of the self-biography in television documentary, and with the development of a corresponding awareness by critics of written biography that biographers cannot keep their own autobiographies distinct from the biographies being written, the challenges self-biography may pose to auto/biography studies deserve discriminating study.

## NOTES

1. I will be using the term cinematic biography to refer to both film and electronic biography, even though I recognize they are distinctly different media.
2. Because its subject does not exert creative control over the medium, and because it is a collaborative rather than an individual undertaking, self-biography also differs from literary self-portraits and those done in the plastic arts.
3. Through this control and self-performance, the subject of a self-biography has an opportunity to display a private self and modify a public persona. The ability to redefine one's image is especially important for celebrities who feel they have been misinterpreted by the media.
4. For an analysis of Sartre's relationship to new modes of communication, see Michael Scriven's *Sartre and the Media,* especially chapters 2, 3, and 7. Although Scriven does not specifically discuss Sartre and the cinema, his study illuminates Sartre's motivations for using audiovisual media. For background on Sartre's participation in the film, see Contat.
5. De Beauvoir states these reasons for making the film in response to a question by Claude Lanzmann in the beginning of the documentary.
6. "Il se peut que ça soit plus intéresant pour me connaître parce que c'est tout à fait spontané" (Lejeune 192; my translation).
7. To their credit, Contat and Astruc wanted to have other questioners. However, Sartre refused to debate with some, such as Raymond Aron, and before other discussants could be approached, the Swiss backers intervened and then withdrew their support (Contat 1176–77).
8. Biological performance is a physical display of an involuntary biological process—sneezing, aging, weight loss, and so forth—that documents the condition of the character in a film or video. As James Naremore notes of fiction film in *Acting in the Cinema,* pure biological performance, such as a death on camera or a sneeze, is rare; however, there is a biological dimension to a subject's performance. In contrast, biological performance is becoming more commonplace in documentaries. This is especially evident in AIDS and imminent-death narratives that document hard deaths. In Sartre's case, he looks physically older in *Simone de Beauvoir,* talks more slowly, and generally appears debilitated.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

9. Berliner said he felt his documentary most resembled the multivocal *Marlene* when I spoke to him during his visit to Indiana University on April 13th, 1998.

## WORKS CITED


Ahlgren, Calvin. "Unassuming Icon with a Poetic Punch: A Documentary on the Life of Beat Writer Ginsberg." *San Francisco Chronicle,* July 4, 1993, Sunday ed.: 27.

Aronson, Jerry, dir. *The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg.* First Run Features, 1993.

Astruc, Alexandre, and Michel Contat, dirs. *Sartre par lui-même.* National Audiovisual Institute, 1976.

Bach, Steven. *Marlene Dietrich: Life and Legend.* New York: Morrow, 1992.

Berliner, Alan, dir. *Nobody's Business.* Cine-Matrix, 1996.

Blaise, Clark. "Your Nearest Exit May Be Behind You: Autobiography and the Post-Modernist Moment." *The Seductions of Biography.* Ed. Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff. New York: Routledge, 1996. 201–09.

Bognar, Steven, dir. *Personal Belongings,* PBS, 1996.

Canby, Vincent. "The Screen: A Self-Portrait of Sartre." *New York Times,* Dec. 1, 1982, late ed.: C32.

Contat, Michel. "Le film *Sartre par lui-même* et l'autobiographe." *Les Temps Modernes* 531–33 (1990): 1159–85.

Corner, John. *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996.

Dayan, Josée, and Malka Ribowska, dirs. *Simone de Beauvoir.* 1982. Interama Video Classics, 1989.

Demme, Jonathan, dir. *Cousin Bobby.* Cinevista Video, 1992.

Denerstein, Thomas. "Humanity Emphasized in Ginsberg Film, 10 Years and a Lifetime in the Making." *Rocky Mountain News,* June 26, 1994, ed. F: 62A.

Ellis, Jack C. *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989.

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* New York: Doubleday, 1959.

———. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963.

Goodman, Walter. "Sartre and Friends in Two-Part Series." *New York Times,* May 28, 1987, late ed.: C22.

Honigsblum, Gerald. "*Sartre by Himself:* Film as Biography and Autobiography." *The French Review* 7 (1982): 123–33.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Je est un autre, l'autobiographie de la literature aux medias.* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980.

Muhammad, Erika. "Seeing Double." *The Independent Film and Video Monthly* 20.3 (1997): 36–38.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Naremore, James. *Acting in the Cinema.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Nichols, Bill. "The Voice of Documentary." *Movies and Methods: An Anthology.* Ed. Bill Nichols. 2 vols. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. 258–73.

Schell, Maximilian, dir. *Marlene.* Alive Film Release, 1984.

Scott, Janny. "When Writers Wish Their Subjects Were Dead." *New York Times,* Oct. 6, 1996, Sunday ed.: 19.

Scriven, Michael. *Sartre and the Media.* New York: St. Martins, 1993.

Stack, Peter. "Documentary About Ginsberg Is Pure Poetry." *San Francisco Chronicle,* July 9, 1993, final ed.: C7.

Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994.

Yu, Jessica, dir. *Breathing Lessons: The Life and Work of Mark O'Brien.* Inscrutable Films, 1996.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# MARLENE: MODERNITY, MORTALITY, AND THE BIOPIC

LUCY FISCHER

## THE SENSE OF AN ENDING

*Cinema, once heralded as the art of the 20th century, seems now, as the century closes . . . to be a decadent art. Perhaps it is not cinema that has ended but only cinephilia—the name of the very specific kind of love that cinema inspired . . . born of the conviction that cinema was an art unlike any other: quintessentially modern.*

—Susan Sontag

In a *New York Times* article written on the heels of centenary celebrations for the cinema, Susan Sontag sounded the death knell for the medium, and for the fanatic love that it once inspired. Drawing upon human/corporeal metaphors, she entitled her piece "The Decay of Cinema," and in an anthropomorphic gesture, she likened the history of the art form to an individual biography. "Cinema's 100 years seem to have the shape of a life cycle," she mused, "an inevitable birth, the steady accumulation of glories and the onset in the last decade of an ignominious, irreversible decline." But if one reads her article carefully, it is clear that Sontag is not so much bemoaning the death of all cinema as the end of a particular filmic mode beloved to her: namely, modernism. She speaks glowingly of the serials of Louis Feuillade (championed by the Surrealists), the work of Dziga Vertov (influenced by Futurism and Constructivism), and the dramas of F. W. Murnau (tied to Expressionism). Furthermore, her essay is illustrated with stills from such modernist "masterpieces" as *Napoleon* (1927), *The 400 Blows* (1959), and *Persona* (1967). Sontag is more disparaging of the "ignominious" contemporary cinema—which she sees not only as relentlessly

 © Biographical Research Center
CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

commercial but as "bloated," "manipulative," and "derivative"—a "brazen combinatory or recombinatory art."

It is not difficult to read here, in her choice of language, allusions to *post*modernism—with its highly touted strategies of excess, contrivance, and pastiche. But Sontag regrets not only the passing of modernist cinema, but the loss of respect for the passion it once generated. As she notes, "Cinephilia itself has come under attack, as something quaint, outmoded, snobbish." Again, the implied voices with which she argues are those of the postmodern critics, who challenge art cinema's alleged elitism, and instead valorize culture's connections to the popular. Clearly, Sontag's move here is a regressive one—as she sees the love of cinema inherently tied to its origins and history. Hence, Sontag speaks of the cinephile's "vast appetite for seeing and reseeing as much as possible of cinema's glorious past." For her, tradition is, by definition, superior: a remake of Godard's *Breathless* cannot possibly be as good as its source. Extending the trope of cinema as individual life, Sontag decries the recent shift to video by remarking how "No amount of *mourning* will revive the vanished rituals . . . of the darkened theater." "If cinema can be resurrected," she concludes, "it will only be through the birth of a new kind of cine-love."

These themes of individual and film history, of birth and death, of love and hate, of mourning and melancholia, circulate in a text that references issues of cinema and modernism—*Marlene* (1983), Maximilian Schell's experimental "biopic" about the famous movie star Marlene Dietrich. If Sontag sees a trajectory of success and decline in the lineage of the medium, that chronicle is doubled in the record of Dietrich's life, which begins at the turn of the century, precisely when the movies and the modernist aesthetic are in ascendancy, and ends in the 1990s, the heyday of Sontag's maligned postmodernism.

## DOCUMENTARY DESIRE

*Truth value is a distinctive feature of the biopic.*

—George Custen (60)

In the same *New York Times* elegy, Sontag mentions the thrill audiences experienced in 1895 "when the train pulled into the station." She is, of course, paying homage to the Lumiére Brothers' *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*—an early work which she chooses to illustrate in her text, thus granting it particular importance. In so doing, Sontag references the *documentary* form—the mode that *Marlene* simultaneously invokes and deconstructs. In truth, it is a genre not always linked to cinematic modernism.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Though Sontag cites Dziga Vertov, an artist associated with the nonfiction form, the majority of her references are to dramatic filmmakers: Renoir, Truffaut, Bertolucci. Significantly, along with recording the arrival of trains (or exotic locales and everyday scenes), in a biographical impulse, the early documentary captured the lives of "stars": politicians like William McKinley "at home"; actors like Mary Irwin, John Rice, and Sarah Bernhardt in performance; or industrialists like M. Lumiére at breakfast with his family. In this respect, the documentary forged an early link between cinema and celebrity, one that the biopic later translated into fiction/dramatic form, and one which later still Schell would translate to Dietrich.

Clearly, what documentary film promised the spectator was a sense of a luminary's presence—a chance not only to see the dignitary, but to experience him or her at a closer range than quotidian circumstances would ever allow. It is precisely this aspiration that Schell's film perversely frustrates, for it is a star biography without a star. Though Dietrich contracted Schell to make the movie, ultimately she refused to appear on-camera in it.

What does Dietrich's defiance signify? What might it tell us about the cinema, the "biopic," film modernism, and the female star?

## BODY DOUBLES

*Soon, very soon maybe, Marlene Dietrich will slink across the screen again. . . . No, this isn't Buddhist reincarnation come to the entertainment world. . . . It's new computer technology that soon should be good enough to resurrect the dead.*

—David Bloom

Pursuing Sontag's call for a return to cinema's roots, I will reexamine the work of a classical film theorist in order to investigate these questions. In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," André Bazin (1918–1958) seeks to comprehend the "essence" of cinema. Assuming a highly modern stance (and again, treating the medium like a human life), he concludes that if cinema were "put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in [its] creation" (9). While on some level, all biography might be thought to "embalm the dead," or to be "aimed against death," as Bazin imagines, for him the cinematic image has a special capacity to capture an individual's existence, since it seems to assure the "continued existence of the corporeal body" (9). In her essay "Film and Theater," Sontag herself makes a similar point: "Movies resurrect the beautiful dead" (370).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Among the cinema's infamous death "productions" have been such films of the 1890s as *Electrocuting an Elephant* and *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots*—one a documentary and one a hoax. Even before that, one of Eadweard Muybridge's photographic motion studies depicted a man shooting a chicken that seems to explode before our very eyes. Later on, there would be such experimental texts as Georges Franju's *The Blood of the Beasts* (1949) about a slaughterhouse, Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971) set in a morgue, and Hollis Frampton's *Apparatus Sum* (1972) concerning an anatomy class, as well as such commercial obscenities as snuff pornography.

Within the spectator's attraction to the cinema would seem to be two competing biographical impulses: one that is morbid and fascinated with death, and another that is vital and enchanted with immortality. Both conjoin in Bazin's image of the Mummy, simultaneously a repulsive artifact of petrified flesh and a magical icon of self-preservation. For Bazin, like mummification, cinematic representation has a special relation to reality, because unlike painting, sculpture, or the literary record, it is "indexical." As he notes, "The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint" (15). Hence, in its Ideal form (minus special effects or computer manipulation), the cinematic image serves an almost scientific function—as "evidence" that what it depicts once existed.

Clearly, cinema is capable of suspending the body in a flash of time—a fact that links the medium to what Leo Charney calls the modernist "cult of the momentary" (281). But Bazin saw cinema's techniques as far more sophisticated. "The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant," he remarks, "Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, *change mummified as it were*" (14–15, my emphasis). Along with time, cinema also captured movement—an element traditionally associated with life, as stasis is with death (Cavell 11).

Obviously, the cinema has slyly scripted into its narratives a catalog of figures and symbols for its powers of revivification—from the corpse coming to life at its own wake, to the mummy escaping from its tomb. Perhaps had Bazin lived longer he would have seized upon a more contemporary practice for an analogy to the cinematic process: *cryogenics,* the act of freezing live (but dying) individuals in order to thaw them out later, when a cure for their disease is found. Like cryogenics, the cinema stores a static or "frozen" image of a subject that is later "defrosted" through the heat of projection. Perhaps this is why the cinema has lately taken on the subject of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

cryogenics in such works as *Sleeper* (1973), *Late for Dinner* (1991), and *Forever Young* (1992). Rumor has it that Walt Disney—a man especially identified with the cinema—now lies in a state of cryogenized suspended animation (Baudrillard 154).

While Bazin's theory of cinema invoked its magical powers, he realized that no modern viewer consciously accepted its illusion of immortality. Rather, Bazin understood that the body which cinema preserved was in large part the corpus of memory. "No one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image," he notes, "but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death"—the self same impulse of "conservation" that motivates the literary biography (10).

It is in fact her "second death" (in anticipation of her first) that Marlene Dietrich hires Maximilian Schell to prevent. But having hired him to create a documentary version of the biopic, why does she so stubbornly subvert his wishes? Why does she refuse to be photographed, and what is interesting about her recalcitrance?

## FADING STARS

*I'm ready for my close-up . . .*

—Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*

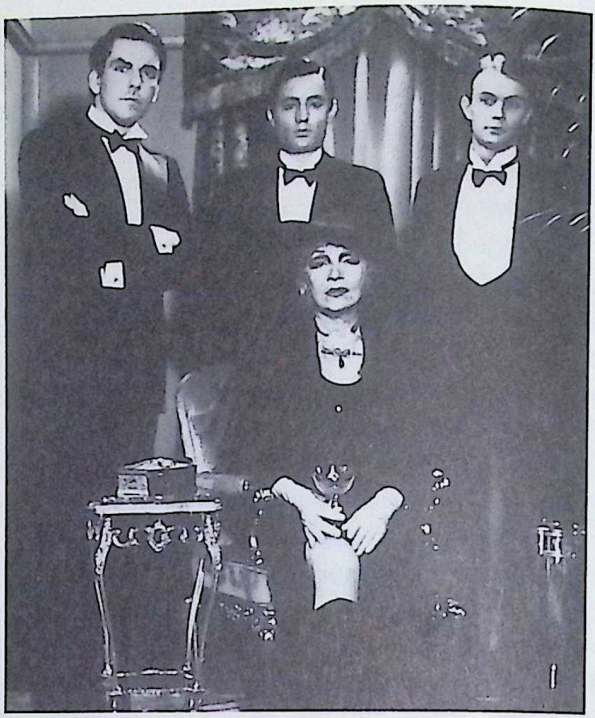
On one level we can surmise that Dietrich refused to appear in *Marlene* because she comprehended and endorsed cinema's "cryogenic" role. (Like Joseph Cornell's Rose Hobart, she wished to remain enshrined in "antique" celluloid.) Contrast this to the news media's proclamation in 1996 that Marilyn Monroe would have turned 70 that year, had she survived. Clearly, such reports were meant to exploit the shock value this revelation would have—fueling our grim fantasies of Monroe's feeble appearance.

As a film star from the late 1920s through the 1960s, Dietrich had been photographed in her prime, and made to look exquisite—with the aid of Hollywood lighting, makeup, and costume. This is the image of her that the public knows and adores, and one that can be restored at will. Why should she exchange it for one of an elderly diva? Clearly, like that of the legendary Greta Garbo, her impulse to hide speaks of both narcissism and savvy.

It is also a fact that Western culture supports the veiling of aged bodies, especially those of women. Patricia Mellencamp writes of her shock in perusing the Rodin Museum in Paris and finding a particular exhibit:

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



From *Just a Gigolo* (© 1981 United Artists Corporation). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

> Unexpectedly, amidst all this lusty creation, I came upon *Celle qui fut la belle Heaulmière,* the famous striking, small statue of an old woman, her shrunken breasts sagging away from her skeletal chest bones, her protruding stomach only folds of wrinkled skin. Her shoulders and neck were deeply bowed, her head and eyes downcast, her mouth and chin collapsed with time into a posture of calm acceptance. . . . She was beautifully old. I was startled by her familiar aging body. (248)

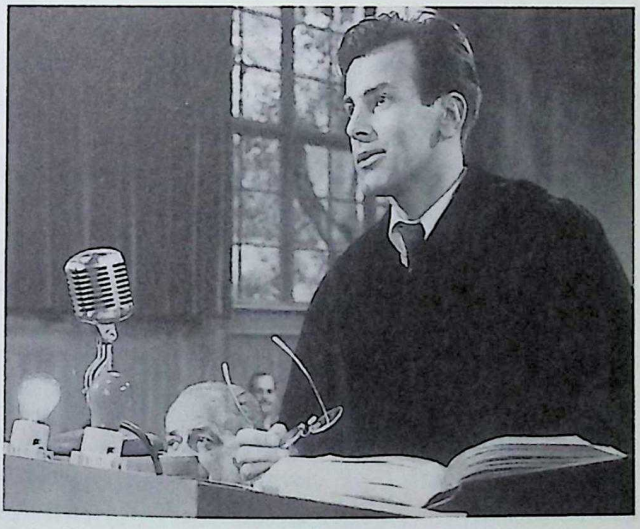
Dietrich also understands the inherent morbidity of the situation—the public's prurient interest in seeing her deterioration. She must have been keenly aware of the audience's potential for both devotion and deviance—for its tendency to worship stars, yet wish them a tragic denouement. Hence she hoists the cinema on its own petard, demanding to remain frozen in time. What she also counters, however, is cinema's notorious voyeurism—especially as attached to the body of the female star. It is for this reason that for the duration of *Marlene* we see only archival images of her, whether from such classic fiction films as *Destry Rides Again* (1939), or from newsreels, documentary interviews, or footage of her stage shows.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Dietrich is of course aware of the particular violence that cinema has done to the mature actress—a phenomenon that has been observed by Edgar Morin. As he notes: "In the American cinema before 1940 the average age of female stars was 20–25; their career was shorter than that of male stars, who may ripen . . . in order to attain an ideal seductive status" (46–47). The lives of many women performers were dramatically reconfigured in Hollywood's biopics, a third of which concerned female entertainers—for instance, Jean Eagels, Gertrude Lawrence, Helen Morgan, Susan Hayward, and Fannie Brice (Custen 76). But the fate of aging actresses has also been narrativized in fiction form—and quite brutally in the canonical *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). In that film, Joe Gillis (William Holden), a down-and-out screenwriter, happens upon the Gothic mansion of Norma Desmond, an old silent movie queen. In desperate need of work, he agrees to collaborate with her on a trite and dated screenplay, and finds himself the object of her delusions, rage, and sexual advances. Throughout the film, Desmond is portrayed as repulsive, predatory, and ghoulish. (In fact, when Gillis first arrives she mistakes him for a mortician she has summoned to bury her pet monkey). When Gillis eventually jilts her, she kills him, and is arrested as she hallucinates a "comeback." The film has a strangely "documentary" and "biographical" air to it, as the role of Desmond is played by a fifty-three-year-old Gloria Swanson—a major film star in the silent era (and ironically, it did produce a comeback for her). Furthermore, two venerable Hollywood directors appear as actors in the film. Cecil B. DeMille, with whom Swanson had worked, plays himself, while Erich von Stroheim plays her butler and former mentor (see Fischer, "*Sunset Boulevard*").[1]

In a strange fashion, the situation of Schell and Dietrich in *Marlene* parallels that of Gillis and Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*—since Schell, a much younger man who was born in 1930, the year *The Blue Angel* was released, has come to the actress's Paris apartment to assist with her dubious movie project. And like Joe Gillis, he has concocted a plot of his own. But rather than allowing herself to be portrayed like



From *Judgment at Nuremburg* (© 1961 United Artists Corporation). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Norma Desmond, fantasizing a screen revival and preparing for her "close-up," Dietrich refuses to be photographed, triumphing over Schell without resorting to murder—just as her screen persona had conquered so many men. There is also a vaguely seductive aspect to Dietrich's engagement of Schell—with whom she had worked in *Judgment at Nuremburg* in 1961. Over the course of the film the two have little "lovers' quarrels" over the shape of the narrative and Dietrich's status within it.

If one were looking for a complete contrast to Dietrich's refusal of the gaze, it might be found on numerous fronts. One thinks of the American celebrity documentary *Truth or Dare* (1991) in which Madonna (at her erotic and professional peak) parades before the camera both on-stage and off.[2] Nothing is too personal or undignified for her to share with us in this biopic, including a visit from her throat doctor, as lover Warren Beatty looks on. But the contrast between Madonna and Marlene is not just a matter of youth versus age. In the cinema verité documentary *Grey Gardens* (1976), an elderly mother and middle-aged daughter—of "interest" largely because they are relatives of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis—agree to be photographed in their decrepit home, and shamelessly preen for the camera. But it is also apparent that the women are mentally unbalanced—and that is, perhaps, the point. Old women, in our culture, would have to be deranged, to agree to become a visual spectacle (see Fischer, *Cinematernity* 179–213).

Yet in another text, *The Wonderful, Horrible World of Leni Riefenstahl* (1993), an eighty-nine-year-old actress/director, in complete command of her senses, happily displays herself to the camera in both scuba diving wet suits and street clothes. In addition to an elderly body, one might imagine that she has a certain "politics" to conceal, but she does nothing of the kind. The key distinction is clearly between those who respond to cinema's call for exhibitionism and those who do not.

Yet, despite Dietrich's refusal to be photographed, and her attempts (as Bazin would say) to "preserve" her life through "a representation of life" in the form of her past cinematic treasures, the specter of death re-enters the frame—like the return of the repressed (10). First of all, one has the distinct impression that both Dietrich and Schell know that the film is being made because she will soon die (which she did in 1992). In her dubbed narration, which perversely reveals, in her raspy, sluggish voice, the very age she has sought to banish from the image, Dietrich jokes about how certain Oscars are "death bed" awards—guiltily granted to their recipients on the eve of their ruin. In this sense, one might imagine *Marlene* as a "death bed" film. Though this is especially true of the biography of an octogenarian, on

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

a theoretical level it is the case for all cinema. As Garrett Stewart has noted: "Not only . . . are all photographs . . . posthumous but they are ostensibly mortifying; telling of a death that was, they warn of a death coming" (25). Thus, it is all the more ironic that the opening credits announce *Marlene* as an "Alive" film release. For in fact it seems a "posthumous" document—and here, we might recall that in the film *Dinner at Eight* (1933), a producer refers to a has-been actor (played by John Barrymore) as a "corpse."

Several excerpts in *Marlene* highlight the theme of mortality. As early as 1931, in an extract from *Dishonored,* we see her killed before a firing squad. In a clip from *Touch of Evil* (1958), Dietrich's character tells Orson Welles (as Hank Quinlan) that his future is "all used up." In *Destry Rides Again,* the refrain of one of her songs is "And when I die. . . ." And a clip from *Just a Gigolo* (1979), her final film, talks of life going on without her.

Beyond such quotations from fiction films, the shadow of death is caught in the documentary segments of the work. At one point, for example, as part of her biographical confessions she speaks of her mother's death, and we see images of a gravestone. When Dietrich describes her own film career, she complains that she has been "photographed to death." Footage of her farewell stage performance in the 1960s reveals a Dietrich who looks already "mummified"—ostensibly through excessive make-up and plastic surgery. And significantly, although in her conversations with Schell, Dietrich refuses to admit a concern with death, and sardonically dismisses conventional notions of an afterlife, it is clear that she knows she has one, albeit in the celluloid versus celestial spheres.

As though to invoke self-reflexively the topic of Dietrich's cinematic life and death, Schell interrupts the pulsing "flow" of the film to present a series of still photographs, mostly from Dietrich's childhood—reminders of the inevitable passage of time. Likewise, he uses many freeze frames, a technique that some have seen as especially resonant with mortality. One especially powerful sequence of this kind occurs in a segment of the film that deals literally with death—Dietrich's attendance at the funeral of Gary Cooper.

## IMITATION OF LIFE

*Whoever turns biographer commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to embellishments, and even to dissembling.*

—Sigmund Freud (qtd. in Custen 148)

If *Marlene* merely presented a conventional star biography, it would not be a noteworthy film; neither would it contribute to discussions of modernism. It does so only because, through its self-conscious strategies, it

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanga Collection, Jammu

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

becomes a virtual treatise on the nature of cinema, the status of documentary, the dynamics of the star system, the position of the biopic, and the role of cinematic innovation.

Schell's willingness to make a film biography of a living woman without a current appearance of her is interesting both in relation to feminist issues and in regard to the ontology of the medium. For Bazin, the cinema was defined in some sense by a cosmic Lack. On one level this pertained to its photographic production, which through its automatic quality largely dispensed with the human hand. "All the arts are based on the presence of man," Bazin notes; "only photography derives an advantage from his absence" (13). But it is mostly through comparisons between cinema and theater that Bazin surfaces issues of absence. As he writes, "the cinema accommodates every form of reality save one—the physical presence of the actor" (95). In making a biopic without the contemporary image of Dietrich, both the actress and director make a statement about the essence of the medium, which unlike the stage, always denies the spectator complete access to the performer. Despite the compensatory frenzy of movie fan culture, here Walter Benjamin's thoughts on the loss of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction are highly relevant. But Dietrich's refusal of voyeurism also draws attention to notions of woman's *genital* Lack—only here, Schell's failure of the gaze associates impotence with Man, and not with his female subject.

Yet there are other more intriguing and complex ways in which Schell, through a series of deconstructive techniques, underscores the nature of cinema. Since he has no star to photograph, he makes the production process a significant aspect of the text. As in *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1928), we repeatedly see the crew working at a film editing table, as images flicker on the Movieola screen. Frequently, they are shots we have already seen projected as part of the film, which lends the text an intricate temporal and narrative scheme. Among the crew, there is an older woman whose identity is not clear. She seems in some respects a stand-in for the elusive Dietrich.

Since Schell is not even allowed to film the space of Marlene's apartment, a request we hear her stridently refuse, he recreates her dwelling, and several moments of *Marlene* are staged in this ersatz mise-en-scène. But even the authenticity of that reconstruction is called into question when Schell admits that his memory has faded, and that he requires a photograph to refresh it. Obviously, the illusionistic nature of the medium is foregrounded here—the realization that most of what we see in dramatic, and even documentary, films is some order of set.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Behind this modernist trope is, of course, a postmodernist one—a nod to Jean Baudrillard's universe of endless "simulacra" (156–60). Extending this sense of hyperreality is Schell's dizzying use of mirrors in Marlene's fake apartment. Aside from referencing the supposed vanity of Dietrich, they invoke notions of cinema as what Bazin would call "a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image" (97). Also circulating here is Jean Cocteau's notion of the mirror as tied to the life cycle: if you want to see death at work, he once said, look in the mirror. Significantly, in the clip from *Dishonored,* Dietrich examines herself in a saber blade before she goes to meet her Maker. Finally, in this equation of death and self-regard, we are reminded of an anecdote told by Sigmund Freud of the uncanny horror he once felt late in life at unexpectedly catching a glimpse of his own aged face in a mirror—a visage he initially failed to recognize (156).[3] Clearly, this is an experience that Dietrich, plagued by cinematic mirrors, feels she can do without.

Further underscoring the sense of cinema as representation are the various reproductions of Dietrich that furnish her counterfeit apartment: a huge framed photograph, a bust. Finally, Schell dissolves boundaries between fact and fiction by interspersing whimsical, staged sequences into his documentary—one a tableau of three Marlene "doubles" in coat and tails; another, a simulation of Marlene being filmed in the silent era.

Violating conventional notions of the primacy of the image in cinematic discourse, Schell accomplishes a "substitution trick," and places all his faith in sound and voice—the repository of all biographical utterance in the film. "What's real?" he asks. "The tape recorder," he answers: "We can take that as our reality." As though to signal this, *Marlene* begins with a black screen and Dietrich speaking. But of course, as Stephen Heath has noted, although voice is often suppressed in the cinema, Dietrich's has been given considerable weight: "the voice is . . . a certain deposit of the body, a certain 'grain,' something else again, in excess, which the standards of Hollywood learned to pacify . . . and in specific instances to exploit ( . . . the voice of a Marlene Dietrich or a Lauren Bacall)" (6).

## DIETRICH TALKS

*I then put her into the crucible of my conception, blended her image to correspond to mine, and, pour[ed] lights on her until the alchemy was complete. . . .*

—Josef von Sternberg (237)

*Marlene* also constitutes a meta-commentary on the relation between the film director and his star—a dynamic that traditionally has had a particular

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

gender configuration. It is clear from the film's inception that the work inscribes a battle of wills—and sexes—between the male filmmaker and his female subject. Schell wishes Dietrich to appear in the film, and she will not; he urges her to recount anecdotes from her life, and she withholds any incident already published in her autobiography; he wants her to intellectualize about performance technique, and she mocks his pretensions; he wants to imagine her a "dreamer," and she insists on her crude practicality. In other words, while he wants her to be Galatea to his Pygmalion, rather than allow herself to be configured as the male's exotic "Other" (like the Surrealists' obscure object of desire), Dietrich insists on defining herself—even though we suspect it requires her to lie. One of the more ironic moments of this struggle occurs when Dietrich is impatient with the direction the film is taking, and lectures Schell on how it should proceed—that is, starting with her shipboard arrival in America, and moving on to her appearances in such Hollywood films as *Morocco* (1930). As though to ridicule her trite notions of linear/chronological documentary form, Schell dutifully, but condescendingly, presents to the viewer the very images that she orders, and we all chuckle at their banality.

If Bazin attempted to psychoanalyze the film medium, we sense that Schell brings his own "medical gaze" to his female subject, acting on what Mary Ann Doane has demonstrated is a male prerogative. He seems to imagine that, as part of the interview process, he will induce in Dietrich a kind of "talking cure." If for Bazin people's love of the cinema is based on the "need for illusion," Schell intends to divest his cinematic subject of this basic human requirement (11). Unlike Freud's Dora, with whom she shares a certain rebellion, Dietrich unfortunately does not depart, and is indignant when Schell walks out on her.

While Schell eventually accepts Dietrich's decision not to be filmed, he resists her refusal to watch her old movies. He sneaks a print of *The Scarlet Empress* (1934) into her apartment and all but forces her to view it with him. (Earlier, he had confessed that he would try to "trick" her.) Though Dietrich claims she has not seen any of her old films recently—"Me, look at myself? No really!"—it is clear that she knows every frame of them, and instructs Schell to notice particular moments. It is obviously Schell's triumph. He has bent her will, and perhaps revealed her duplicity. What he has not considered, however, is the ostensible suffering it might bring her to confront her former splendor. Or if he has, he has callously decided that it is well worth the injury. It is Marlene's compassionate assistant who slips Schell a note, quoting the words of Dante, reminding him, "There is no greater pain than the recollection of past happiness in times of misery."

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

From *The Blue Angel* (*Der Blaue Engel* © 1930 Universum Film A.G.). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archives.

But beyond thrusting upon Dietrich imposed career reminiscences, Schell attempts to prod her thoughts about her family—acting not only like a biographer and a psychiatrist, but like a detective—searching for the clues to the Marlene-enigma.[4] Schell asks Dietrich if she ever missed her father, who died when she was young. She coolly replies, "you can't miss what you never had," but we sense Schell's impatience with her guarded response. Clearly, he wants melodrama and tears, and he gets both when he raises the topic of her mother—which he sees as the key to her consciousness and to the crime of her dissembling. Though Dietrich has refused all sentimentality throughout the film, he finally causes her to break down at its end, when he asks her to recite with him a simple poem that her mother esteemed, concerning a person begging for forgiveness at a loved one's grave. Finally, Dietrich's arch superiority collapses as she succumbs to a cliché; her harsh, imperial voice cracks and we recognize the sound of muffled sobs. As Benedict Anderson has written, "nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language" (145), and here too we recall that Michel Chion once described the cinema as "a machine made in order to deliver a cry from the female voice" (68, qtd. in Silverman 77). It is precisely this that Schell has served up. Dietrich's disintegration also confirms

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Custen's view that the "lesson one learns from biopic vicissitudes . . . is quite simple: with an unusual gift comes unusual suffering" (75).

In Dietrich's momentary and pathetic contemplation of the maternal, the "mummy complex" finally meets the "mommy complex" at the hands of a man young enough to be Dietrich's son. Schell has forced Dietrich to publicly grieve—for her lost youth, fame, beauty, childhood, and family—much as Welles does to his protagonist in *Citizen Kane* (1941), whose imagery is fleetingly quoted in *Marlene*. Though the moment of Dietrich's recollection is compelling, we find it vaguely pornographic—and perceive Schell as having moved from a posture of Reverence to Rape. In his biographical zeal, he has stripped Dietrich of both personal and cinematic illusions, leaving her—and us—to confront the aesthetic and psychic void. She of course retaliates later on, when she savagely orders her director to "go back to Mama Schell and learn some manners."

## THE PAINTER OF MODERN LIFE

*For Death must be somewhere in a society . . . perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life.*

—Roland Barthes (92)

The question, of course, arises as to where *Marlene* stands in relation to modernist/postmodernist debates. Clearly, *Marlene* bears traces of the postmodern (as is evident from my mention of its ubiquitous simulacra). Beyond this, Dietrich herself often assumes a rather postmodern perspective. She derides her status as a sublime screen goddess, and admits that she never especially liked sex. As the viewer watches excerpts of her museum-quality films, Schell waxes poetic about them, and urges Dietrich to do the same. Instead, she relentlessly hurls charges against them—of "kitsch" and "kvwatch"—deeming them rubbish, outdated, Camp. Again, we are not entirely sure that she means this, but at least her words pull the rug out from under the precious modernist posture. In a similar vein, when Schell informs Dietrich of the politically-correct readings of her screen persona she announces that she hates feminists and accuses them of penis envy. Finally, she repeatedly declares herself "bored" with Schell's inquiries, and with the films that he finds so divine.

But other aspects of *Marlene* seem tied to modernist concerns. P. Adams Sitney has discussed the "resistance to vision" that subtends many such texts—a stance that questions the "status and values of seeing." As he notes, "Dramatic moments of vision occur in these works, in which nothing, or

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


nothing dramatic is seen" (2–3). One could hardly find a better description of the central tension of *Marlene*, a film which denies the spectator visual substance and pleasure, and subverts the power of cinema as panopticon. Furthermore, the somber and earnest tone of the film seems ultimately to belie Dietrich's parodic cynicism, and links the text to a modernist aesthetic. For the film's deconstructive techniques are never merely playful, but seek such profundities as the Truth of Dietrich's psyche, the Essence of the film medium, and the Key to human existence. If the film's concerns are "post-" anything they are more post-mortem than post-modern—invested in such sober issues as Life and Death. In this regard, it seems interesting that the site of the taping for *Marlene* is Paris—where Dietrich retired and lived until her passing. For if any locale is identified with the birth of modernism, it is this French city during the late nineteenth century—a metropolis associated with such artists as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stephane Mallarmé (Nicholls 1). As Peter Nicholls makes clear, the movement was tied to the theme of mortality: two of the chapters of his book on the subject are entitled "Decadence and the Art of Death" and "Death and Desire."

Similarly, in writing of the modern entertainments that preceded and presaged film spectatorship, Vanessa Schwartz focuses on the Paris morgue and the Musée Grevin—the latter, a wax works specializing in celebrity likenesses (298–311). It is the same solemn modernist contemplation of mortality that informs *Marlene*, and that links it and its actress-corpse-effigy-*femme fatale* to those historic sites of Parisian popular spectacle. If in her essay Susan Sontag calls for a new kind of cine-love to replace cinephilia, Maximilian Schell proposes an old one—necrophilia.

But, clearly, despite her alleged archival immortality, it is not only Dietrich who will age and fade, but the very film medium in which she is supposedly preserved. Hence, though long thought to have an advantage over literature, the cinema as a biographical format may bear a certain vulnerability. This issue is raised in the eccentric film *Lyrical Nitrate* (1991)—a "modernist montage" of silent film fragments that speaks to the biographical fate of the medium. One sequence of this text, a virtual treatise on cinematic impermanence and fragility, begins with a shot of a film projectionist, then moves on to some anonymous, turn-of-the-century biblical epic depicting Adam and Eve in the Garden. In the film's return to Genesis and Eden, we also recover cinema's origins and innocence—all to the strains of a female, operatic/maternal voice that would please Kaja Silverman. But in short order the scene becomes troubled, as marks on the emulsion (made from decomposition) obscure the action and view—forcing us to look

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

"through a glass darkly." Resembling the abstract images of Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963)—created from pressed dead insect wings—the celluloid deterioration raises questions of mortality, as the intertitles speak of death and an image of the Grim Reaper appears. Fittingly, in "Falling in Love Again," Dietrich's famous torch song from *The Blue Angel*, she compares her doomed suitors to moths attracted to a flame.

But there is a moment in *Marlene* in which the filmic material also degenerates. Failing to capture a new image of the reluctant Dietrich, Schell projects an old one on the wall, and in an act of directorial passive-aggression, allows the film to combust and melt before our eyes. Here, the disintegrating celluloid is vaguely reminiscent of the portrait photographs that burn on a hot plate in Hollis Frampton's *nostalgia* (1971)—a work whose title could not more aptly echo the bittersweet biographical themes of *Marlene*. But while *Marlene* may invoke the modernism of the primitive cinema, and of the American avant-garde, it also relates to the post-World War II European "New Wave"—a movement that Catherine Russell sees as characterized by "narrative mortality." As though to pay respect to this cinema, Schell produces an experimental sequence that blatantly alludes to such auteurs as Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini.

In fact, *Marlene* as a whole might be regarded as a loose remake of *Persona,* a film much prized by Susan Sontag. For like the actress Elizabeth Vogler, who will not speak, Dietrich, a performer, refuses to appear. And like the nurse who tries to uncover Vogler's biographical secrets in her summer home, Schell attempts to pierce Dietrich's defenses in her Paris apartment. Significantly, in P*ersona* the psychoanalytic process is linked to cinema and death. As part of a montage that signifies a psychic break within the narrative, Bergman displays the camera, burns the celluloid, and splices in silent movie footage of a dancing skeleton.

As we have seen, Schell synchronizes his own modernist vignette with Dietrich's angry voice calling him the worst name she can think of—a "film buff"—banishing him to a "film institute," where she sentences him to communing with "old people" and savoring his relics. Here, perhaps the most fetishized actress in the history of cinema charges Schell with film fetishism. She also implicitly derides his love of the kind of "retrospectives" that play at what Sontag deems the art form's "temples"—film clubs and *cinémathèques.* It is a less celebratory sense of "retrospective" that informs *Marlene*—where filmography and biography, direction and introspection, image and Imaginary, drama and trauma, hopelessly superimpose.

In Dietrich's tone of mockery, however, we are ultimately reminded of the words of Andy Warhol, who expressed his own misgivings about fame, media, and immortality:

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

> At the end of my time, when I die, I don't want to leave any leftovers. And I don't want to be a leftover. I was watching TV this week and I saw a lady go into a ray machine and disappear. That was wonderful, because matter is energy and she just dispersed. That could be a really American invention, the best American invention, to be able to disappear. . . . The worst thing that could happen to you after the end of your time would be to be embalmed and laid up in a pyramid. I'm repulsed when I think about the Egyptians. . . . I want my machinery to disappear. (112–13)

With his characteristic wit and brilliance, Warhol brings together the themes of death, celebrity, antiquity, and modernity. Though he desires an American invention that could make us disappear, he *and* we are stuck with one that makes us appear forever—the cinema.

Warhol's wish to make his own "machinery" evaporate is perhaps a secret wish to vaporize the quintessential "machine of the visible." It is against this complex notion of constituting a "leftover"—bodily, biographically, and artistically—that Dietrich so forcefully rails in *Marlene*.

Dietrich in tails, from *Morocco* (© 1930 Paramount Pictures). Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Still Archives.

## NOTES

1. Just how strong the legacy is of Norma Desmond is apparent from an article about a journalist's encounter with another aging actress—this time, a real one—Mary Tyler Moore. As Jonathan Van Meter noted when he visited the star's home, inscribed over the intercom are the words: "Open the Gates for Miss Desmond" (40).
2. The comparison between *Marlene* and *Truth or Dare* was raised to me by Katrin Micklitz, a graduate student in my class at the University of Pittsburgh.
3. Patricia Mellencamp recounts this anecdote in *High Anxiety*.
4. Marlene's reluctance to discuss her family background is, according to George Custen, typical of the standard "biopic," which minimizes the role of the subject's family (149).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## WORKS CITED


Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 1995.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Baudrillard, Jean. "From 'Simulacra and Simulations.'" Brooker. 151–62.

Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?* Selected and trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley: U of California P, 1967.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations.* Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968. 217–51.

Bloom, David. "Computers Usher in the Era of the Virtual Movie Star." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* July 1, 1988: E3.

Brooker, Peter, ed. *Modernism/Postmodernism.* London: Longman, 1992.

Cavell, Stanley. "What Photography Calls Thinking." *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 4.4 (Spring 1985): 1–21.

Charney, Leo. "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity." Charney and Schwartz. 279–94.

Charney, Leo, and Vanessa Schwartz, eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Chion, Michel. *La Voix du Cinema.* Paris: Éditions de L'Etoile, 1982.

Custen, George. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.

Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. 38–69.

Fischer, Lucy. *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.

_____. "Sunset Boulevard: Fading Stars." *Women and Film.* Ed. Janet Todd. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988. 97–113.

Freud, Sigmund. *Creativity and the Unconscious.* New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

Heath, Stephen. "Language, Sight and Sound." *Cinema and Language.* Ed. Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp. New York: American Film Institute, 1983. 1–20.

Mellencamp, Patricia. *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.

Morin, Edgar. *The Stars.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove, 1960.

Nicholls, Peter. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Russell, Catherine. *Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure, and New Wave Cinemas.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.

Schwartz, Vanessa. "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris." Charney and Schwartz. 297–319.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Sitney, P. Adams. *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature.* New York: Columbia UP, 1990.

Sontag, Susan. "The Decay of Cinema." *New York Times Magazine,* Feb. 25, 1996: 60–61.

—. "Film and Theater." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings.* Ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy. 4th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. 362–74.

Stewart, Garrett. "Photo-gravure: Death, Photography, and Film Narrative." *Wide Angle* 9.1 (Jan. 1987): 12–31.

Van Meter, Jonathan. "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary." *New York Times Magazine,* Nov. 26, 1995: 38–41.

Von Sternberg, Josef. *Fun in a Chinese Laundry.* New York: Collier, 1965.

Warhol, Andy. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again).* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# BIOPIC BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALANA BELL

This bibliography includes texts on both the biopic and the television docudrama. Though these genres are not new, scholarly study of them has been limited. The major work in the study of the biopic is George F. Custen's *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (1992), which looks at the almost three hundred biopics produced by major Hollywood studios from 1927–1960, examining "the code of the biographical film, its construction, and the particular world view it creates when defining history" (4). Bridging the genres of the biopic and docudrama, Alan Rosenthal's *Why Docudrama? Fact and Fiction on TV* (1999) examines the television docudrama as well as films such as *JFK* and *In The Name of the Father.* On the whole, the docudrama has received more attention than the biopic. I have included two other book-length studies of the docudrama in this bibliography: Derek Paget's *True Stories* (1990), which examines radio, stage, and film docudrama in England, and his *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/docudrama on Television* (1988), which looks at film and television docudrama in Britain and the United States. Valuable information on both the docudrama and biopic can also be found in several dissertations.

Several small articles on both genres have been published in popular magazines, and an increasing number of more scholarly pieces are appearing as well. In choosing texts for this list, I looked first for articles that moved beyond the simple fact/fiction dichotomy that has been the focus of so much written about these genres. I have included a selection of articles that provide generic outlines of both forms. Carolyn Anderson's "Biographical Film" defines the genre of the biopic, and Thomas Hoffer, Richard Nelson, and Robert Musburger have, both separately and in collaboration, written several articles defining and tracing the history of the docudrama. Though there are numerous articles on individual biographical


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

films, and especially such recent films as *JFK, Malcolm X,* and *Nixon,* I have included such essays only when they also consider the relationship of the particular film to the biopic or docudrama as genre, or when they consider issues not widely addressed elsewhere in the study of these genres. I have tried to find texts that deal with such issues as the production process, and the legal, ethical, social, and cultural dimensions of the genre. I have also chosen articles that represent different sub-genres of the biopic and docudrama, including musicals, science, and campaign biopics, film and oral history, women's autobiographical films, and biographical documentary. To give an international perspective, I have included articles about the biopic or docudrama in Egypt, Hong Kong, Canada, and Britain, as well as the United States.

Both the biopic and docudrama are implicated, if not directly addressed, in texts about film and history. In cases where such texts discuss these genres specifically, I have cited chapters; otherwise I have cited the text as a whole.

Anderson, Carolyn. "Biographical Film." *A Handbook of American Film Genres.* Ed. Wes D. Gehring. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988. 331–51.

Provides a profile of the biopic genre based on conventions illustrated by 200 biographical feature films produced from 1929 to 1986.

Arlen, Michael J. "Adrift in Docu-Drama." *The Camera Age: Essays on Television.* New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1981. 276–84.

Explores the debate about the "proper relationship" between fact and fiction in the docudrama.

Auster, Albert. "The Missiles of October: A Case Study of Television Docudrama and Modern Memory." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 17.4 (1988): 164–72.

Considers issues of historical accuracy, and the contribution to the genre of the 1974 docudrama on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Barker, Steven Philip. "Fame: A Content Analysis Study of the American Film Biography." Diss. Ohio State University, 1983.

Examines thirty Oscar-nominated biopics produced between 1929 and 1979, determining whether subjects are positive role models by using behavioral science tests for measuring intellectual and moral development.

Bergan, Ronald. "Whatever Happened to the Biopic?" *Film and Filming* 346 (July 1983): 21–22.

Drawing on innumerable examples, looks at various biopic types and the ways they transform reality into myth.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Bingham, Dennis. "'I Do Want to Live!': Female Voices, Male Discourse, and Hollywood Biopics." *Cinema Journal* 38.3 (Spring 1999): 3–26.
This examination of the 1958 biopic of Barbara Graham discusses ways in which the film works in opposition to traditional representations of women in biopics.

Bleum, A. William. "Human Drama: Biographers to Plot Finders." *Documentary in American Television.* New York: Hastings House, 1965.
In this chapter Bleum traces the movement of the 1950s and 1960s television biographical documentary from narrative to dramatic form.

Breitbart, Eric. "From the Panorama to the Docudrama: Notes on the Visualization of History." *Radical History Review* 25 (1981): 115–25.
Investigates the effects of the mass media on the "visualization of history" and the implications for both audiences and historians.

Brinkley, Robert. "Tracing *Shoah.*" *PMLA* 111.1 (Jan. 1996): 108–27.
Explores the role of the audience as historical witness.

Broughton, Connie. "Filming Nana: Some Dilemmas of Oral History on Film." *Frontiers* 19.3 (1998): 190–99.
This personal account of the issues involved in turning family oral history into a film considers the problems of negotiating historical truth and maintaining respect for the voice of the subject in historical films using oral history.

Carnes, Mark C., ed. *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies.* New York: Holt, 1995.
Composed of brief studies of nearly 100 historical films, many of which are biopics, and concerned primarily with historical accuracy, this work measures films against the literary and historical texts upon which they are based.

_____. "Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies." *Cineaste* 22.4 (Fall 1996): 33–38.
An interview with Oliver Stone about the role of historical films in the construction of history, in which Stone suggests these films are "rough drafts" that raise issues, challenge reigning historical opinions, and prompt further investigation.

Carveth, Rod. "Amy Fisher and the Ethics of 'Headline' Docudramas." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 21.3 (Fall 1993): 121–27.
Uses the Fisher/Buttafuoco docudramas as case studies to examine ethical dilemmas of the docudrama, such as effects on key characters, failure to address social and political contexts of events, and historical accuracy.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Combs, James. "Television Aesthetics and the Depiction of Heroism: The Case of the TV Historical Biography." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 8.2 (1980): 9–18

Explains the popularity of the television historical biography during the late 1970s by suggesting that these films fed society's desire for heroes, voyeurism, and romantic adventure.

Corner, John. *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996.

Uses examples from the 1930s, 1950s, and 1980s to discuss documentary, docudrama, and cinema verite genres.

Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.

The most extensive study of the biopic to date, examines films produced by the major studios from 1927 to 1960 as a "supertext" to explore how the genre conflates separate historical events into an almost uniform "Hollywood view of history."

Crawford, T. Hugh. "Screening Science: Pedagogy and Practice in William Dieterle's Film Biographies of Scientists." *Common Knowledge* 6.2 (Fall 1997): 52–68.

Uses sociology of science theory to examine Dieterle's biopics as scientific practice.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. "'Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead': Film and the Challenge of Authenticity." *Yale Review* 76.4 (Summer 1987): 457–82.

Suggests ways for films to make more complex and dramatic truth claims than the traditional poles of "simple truth" and "coincidental resemblance," and argues for the value of historical film in portraying the past.

Doherty, Thomas. "Seamless Matching." *National Forum* 77.3 (Summer 1997): 39–43.

Suggests Oliver Stone's "seamless matching" of archival footage and dramatic material makes *JFK* a perfect example of the docudrama, and that the backlash against the film demonstrates the persistence of historical standards.

Ellis, Jack C. *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989.

Survey of documentary genres in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain from the 1920s to the 1980s.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Film as Social History: The Dieterle/Warner Brothers Bio-pic." *Wide Angle* 8.2 (1986): 15–22.

Uses the Dieterle/Warner Brothers biopics as a case study to look at ways self-regulation in the film industry and social ideology influenced and was reflected by film genres and cycles.

Feldman, Seth. "The Electronic Fable: Aspects of the Docudrama in Canada." *Canadian Drama* Spring 1983: 39–48.

Suggests that Canadian docudrama, influenced by the National Film Board's emphasis on information over entertainment, can be read as a type of folktale in which the primary characters take on the archetypes of teacher and learner.

*Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies.* Ed. Ken Dvorak. <http://h-net.msu.edu/~filmhis/>.

The *Film and History* web site includes a 26-year index to *Film and History*, links to other film and history web sites, calls for manuscripts, conference information, and information about where to find and purchase films and videos.

Gomez, Joseph A. "'Mahler' and the Methods of Ken Russell's Films on Composers." *Velvet Light Trap* 14 (Winter 1975): 45–50.

Examines the relationship between music and image in Ken Russell's biopics of composers.

Gordon, Joel. "Film, Fame and Public Memory: Egyptian Biopics from *Mustafa Kamil* to *Nasser 56*." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31.1 (Feb. 1999): 61–79.

Traces the history of the biopic in Egypt, where government supervision has influenced cinema, to pose questions about public memory, historical accuracy, and artistic depictions of fame.

Grant, Barry Keith, ed. *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video.* Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1998.

Collection of essays addressing film, video, and television subgenres of the documentary.

Gustafson, Richard. "The Vogue of the Screen Biography." *Film and History* 3.3 (1977): 49–54.

This retrospective look at the rise and fall of the 1930s and 1940s Hollywood biopic looks at what types of lives were portrayed and how successful the portrayals were, and identifies common biopic motifs.

Hanson, Cynthia A. "The Hollywood Musical Biopic and the Regressive Performer." *Wide Angle* 10.2 (1988): 15–23.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Examines ways in which biopics of professional musicians create an alliance between audience and subject by balancing the subject's public success with personal problems.

Hoffer, Thomas W., and Richard Alan Nelson. "Evolution of Docudrama on American Television Networks: A Content Analysis, 1966–1978." *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* 45 (Winter 1980): 149–63.

Defines the docudrama, locates it in a tradition of texts that combine fact and fiction, and performs a quantitative analysis of programs produced from 1966 to 1978.

Hoffer, Thomas W., Richard Alan Nelson, and Robert Musburger. "Docudrama." *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide.* Ed. Brian G. Rose. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985. 181–212.

Defines and traces the history of the American television docudrama. Includes a bibliography and videography.

Hurowitz, Richard. "Surviving Copyright Infringement: Fair Use of Protected Work in 'Biopics'." *VLA Journal of Law and the Arts* 22.2 (1998): 247–68.

Using the film *Surviving Picasso* as an example, argues on the basis of the historical and cultural value of the films that the "fair use" exception to copyright infringement should be applicable to allow biographical filmmakers access to and use of protected works.

Jaehne, Karen. "Schrader's *Mishima:* An Interview." *Film Quarterly* 39.3 (Spring 1986): 11–17.

Interview with Paul Schrader about the making of the abstract biopic based on the life of Yukio Mishima.

Jarvik, Laurence. "'It's Only a Movie': The Television Docu-drama and Social Issue Movie as the American Marketplace of Ideas." *Studies in Popular Culture* 11.1 (1988): 80–96.

Posits the television docudrama as "socially conscious art" that instigates discussion among Americans about contemporary social issues.

Karsten, Eileen. *From Real Life to Reel Life: A Filmography of Biographical Films.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1993.

A filmography of major American biographical films since the 1920s.

Landy, Marcia. "Sheets of the Past: Folklore, the Biopic, and *The Scarlet Empress.*" *Cinematic Uses of the Past.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. 151–90.

Uses *The Scarlet Empress* as a case study to examine the uses of history and folklore in the biopic.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Lavelle, Nanci Davidson. "'Baby M': A Case Study of the True Story Made for TV Movie." Diss. U of Oregon, 1995.

Uses "Baby M" as a case study to examine the effects production process, cultural discourse surrounding the events, and screenwriting formulae have on fact in the television docudrama.

Lembcke, Jerry. "From Oral History to Movie Script: The Vietnam Veteran Interviews for *Coming Home.*" *Oral History Review* 26.2 (Summer-Fall 1999): 65–86.

Examines interview transcripts, story conferences, and movie scripts to show how oral history was transformed into the screenplay for *Coming Home.*

Linville, Susan E. *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women's Auto/biographical Film in Postwar Germany.* Austin: U of Texas P, 1998.

Examines ways in which German women filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s created films that focus on the traditional German women's sphere of children, church, and kitchen to critique the patriarchal structure of the postwar society they experienced as children. [Reviewed in this issue.]

Lockwood, Lewis. "Film Biography as Travesty: *Immortal Beloved* and Beethoven." *Musical Quarterly* 81.2 (Summer 1997): 190–98.

Argues that *Immortal Beloved* fails as a biography because it makes no attempt at an accurate portrayal of Beethoven's life and art, and instead reinforces Romantic myths about his personality, particularly his relationships with women.

Lynch, Joan D. "*Camille Claudel:* Biography Constructed as Melodrama." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26.2 (1998): 117–23.

Suggests that Bruno Nuytten's 1988 biopic *Camille Claudel* masks itself as a feminist film while it is actually melodrama, a genre that portrays women as victims. Suggests ways a feminist biopic might have treated its subject.

Maingard, Macqueline. "Trends in South African Documentary Film and Video: Questions of Identity and Subjectivity." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21 (1995): 657–67.

Explores issues of identity formation raised in South African docudramas.

McClelland, Doug. *Blackface to Blacklist: Al Jolson, Larry Parks, and The Jolson Story.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1987.

An account of the making of the 1946 biopic *The Jolson Story,* and its 1949 sequel, *Jolson Sings Again.*

Millard, Kathryn. "Projected Lives: A Meditation on Biography and Cinematic Space." *Screening the Past: Films and the Representation of History.* Ed. Tony Barta. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998. 231–37.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

A biographical filmmaker considers Paul Carter's notion of "spacial history" as a way to approach the biopic that moves beyond the traditional heroic, linear narrative.

Miller, Robert Milton. *Star Myths: Show Business Biographies on Film.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1983.

Describes the show business biopic as a largely fictive genre in which the most important elements are theme and myth. Includes summaries of more than 125 films produced between 1930 and 1981.

Moreale, Joanne. "Playing Politics: Mythical Portraiture in Presidential Campaign Films." *News Photographer* 51.1 (Jan. 1996): 8–13.

Examines the ways presidential campaign films use mythic examples to construct an image of the candidate as the embodiment of the American dream.

Musburger, Robert B. "Setting the Stage for the Television Docudrama." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 13.2 (1985): 92–101.

Defines docudrama and traces its origins in theatre, radio, literature, film, and early television.

O'Connor, John, and Martin A. Jackson, eds. *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image.* 2nd ed. New York: Ungar, 1988.

Examines films as documents of social history.

___. *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television.* Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger, 1990.

Suggests ways of using historical method to read television and film as historical documents, and argues that doing so can contribute to a greater understanding of both history and media.

Paget, Derek. *No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/docudrama on Television.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.

A study of British and American docudrama production processes, legal issues, generic conventions, and academic debates surrounding the form.

___. *True Stories.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990.

A political and social investigation of radio, stage, and film docudrama in England.

Pilgrim, Tim A. "Television and the Destruction of Democracy: Blurring of Fiction and Fact as Hegemonic Tool." *Studies in Popular Culture* 15.1 (1992): 83–94.

Investigates the social and cultural significance of the increasingly permeable boundaries between fact and fiction on television, suggesting that this

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

blurring promotes "consumptive behavior" by numbing the viewer's capacity for critical thinking.

Ralston, Ramona M., and Sidney L. Sondergard. "Screening Byron: The Idiosyncracies of the Film Myth." *Byromania: Portraits of the Artist in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Culture.* Ed. Francis Wilson. London: MacMillan, 1999. 137–53.

Examines representations of Byron in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1933), *The Bad Lord Byron* (1948), *Lady Caroline Lamb* (1972), *Gothic* (1986), *Rowing with the Wind* (1988), *Haunted Summer* (1990), and *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990). Considers both film production and audience reception.

Rosenstone, Robert A., ed. *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

A collection of essays considering the use of visual media as a unique way of representing and interpreting history. Examines "the new history film," which is less concerned with entertainment or profit than with understanding the past.

_____. *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.

Examines the possibilities historical films create for the study of history, and looks at what happens when written history is transformed into image.

Rosenthal, Alan, ed. *Why Docudrama? Fact and Fiction on TV.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

This collection of essays includes critiques of individual films, and sections on filmmaking practice and on theoretical, political, and social aspects of the docudrama.

_____. *Writing Docudrama.* Boston: Focal Press, 1995.

An instructional book on writing television docudrama. Considers finding a topic, research, scriptwriting, and issues such as truth, agency, rights, and legal problems.

Schulze, Laurie. "The Made-for-TV Movie: Industrial Practice, Cultural Form, Popular Reception." *Television: The Critical View.* Ed. Horace Newcomb. New York: Oxford UP, 1982. 155–75.

Explores the critical response, production practices, and generic forms of the made-for-tv movie.

Shaw, Myron Berkley. "A Descriptive Analysis of the Documentary Drama Television Program, the Armstrong Circle Theatre, 1951–1961." Diss. U of Michigan, 1962.

Examines the sponsorship, production, subjects dramatized, and audience

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and critical reception of the first sixty-minute TV series to use docudrama form.

Starkman, Ruth. "Mother of All Spectacles: Ray Müller's *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*." *Film Quarterly* 51.2 (Winter 1997): 21–32.

Looks at ways Müller's biographical documentary about the famous Nazi filmmaker and "mother of the documentary" dealt with his subject's involvement in art and politics.

Stringer, Julian. "Centre Stage: Reconstructing the Biopic." *Cineaction* 42 (1997): 28–39.

Suggests that the biopic of Chinese film star Ruan Lingyu is meta-cinema which reconstructs the biopic genre in a move in keeping with Hong Kong filmmakers' search for localized forms and subjectivity on the verge of post-colonialism.

Sturken, Marita. "Reenactment, Fantasy, and the Paranoia of History: Oliver Stone's Docudramas." *History and Theory* 36.4 (December 1997): 64–80.

Examines Stone's docudramas, asking why they have been popular, cathartic, and subject to attack, and uses these films to discuss docudrama form, the role of image in the production of history, and history as paranoia.

Thomson, David. "The Invasion of the 'Real' People." *Sight and Sound* 47.1 (Winter 1977–1978): 18–22.

Suggests that the increasingly dramatic representations of real people since the 1930s biopics destabilize audience notions of reality, and promote uniformity and consumer culture.

Tischler, Barbara. "Jim Morrison, Oliver Stone, and the Quest for the Sixties." *Film and History* 28.3–4 (1998): 38–46.

Suggests that *The Doors* has limited historical value as a representation of the Sixties because of Stone's focus on Jim Morrison's life and avoidance of most of the "critical historical issues" of the period.

Welsh, James M. "Hollywood 'Faction' and the New Biofantasy." *Studies in Popular Culture* 15.2 (1993): 57–66.

Examines biographical films of the late 80s and early 90s, suggesting these films should be described as biofantasy because they privilege fantasy over biography.

Wilson, John Howard. "Sources for a Neglected Masterpiece: Paul Schrader's *Mishima*." *Biography* 20.3 (Summer 1997): 265–83.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Argues that *Mishima* provides a model for cinematic biography in its use of a wide range of sources, cinematic styles, and alternation of biographical scenes with scenes from the author's work.

Wye, Melissa Jean. "From Hyannisport to Hollywood: A Critical Theory Approach to the Development of the Candidate Bio Film In Modern Politics." Diss. U of Southern California, 1996.

Explores ways in which John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign film, *The New Frontier,* in collapsing the boundary between the public and private life of the candidate, set a precedent for successive presidential campaign films and created the genre of the biodocumentary campaign film.

Yee, Marian G. "'An Anthology of Ourselves': British Documentary Expression in the 1930s." Diss. Rutgers, 1994.

Examines the use of documentary to construct a working class identity in contrast to the self-image of the middle class.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# REVIEWS

Suzette Henke. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing.* New York: St. Martin's, 1999. 216 pp. ISBN 0-312-21020-5, $45.00.

Another volume with trauma in the title? Is trauma ironically in danger of becoming the latest intellectual fashion—"ironically" because "fashion" stands at the opposite pole from the realities of traumatic experience? Precisely because that is the case, I don't think too much can be said about trauma, although we do need to understand the intellectual and political reasons for the emergence of interest in trauma *now* in the humanities.[1] How is trauma theory being mobilized in literary studies? Is it changing critical paradigms? Do its perspectives illuminate fiction and fictional lives? What may trauma theory add to literary analysis?

Suzette Henke's book is an appropriate site within which to visit these questions. It offers re-readings of the literary writing of six women through the lens of recent trauma theory. The writers are Colette, H.D., Anaïs Nin, Janet Frame, Audre Lorde, and Sylvia Fraser. Henke wisely selects women from different nations—France only figures so prominently in the first three figures for arbitrary reasons—and importantly includes African American Audre Lorde. Many other women writers could have been selected, but the ones chosen are more than sufficient to support Henke's thesis. She coins the term "scriptotherapy" to argue that, in each case, the writer used literature—its processes, its creative modalities—to heal or cure herself of damaging traumatic experiences.

As I read, I was torn between two contradictory views about Henke's project. At first, I thought Henke's method trapped her in an old literary/critical problem—that of reducing the works to the women's lives. The texts themselves—their qualities, genres, images, language, and so on—disappear as they are used simply as direct evidence of a trauma that Henke has named and isolated in the life. But it occurred to me that trauma theory may open up a new, more viable way of linking the life and the text—a way out of our puritanism about texts and lives that has, at least since New Criticism and on through post-structuralism, prohibited critics seeing the one in any easy way in relation to the other.

It would, then, be wrong to devalue the volume because it violated the old "text versus life" literary boundary. The book is less about the texts than

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

about the historical women. Despite her Introduction, informed by recent psychology and literary and trauma theory, and her acknowledging a new positioning between life and text—she refers to Shoshana Felman's important observation that "A life testimony is not simply testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*" (14, qtd. in Henke xii). Henke is not essentially interested in this new critical position. Seen this way, why does Henke need to deal with texts qua literature? Henke's volume is closer to psychobiography than to contributing to theories about "testimony." She uses the women's writing to illuminate their life experiences, and deliberately chooses women authors whose works betray some original familial trauma.[2]

Henke's method is, essentially, to put her author on the couch. Taking an unapologetic psychoanalytic framework as given, Henke interprets each writer's literary world in terms of each author's lived oedipal relations and family traumas. It is hard to know, however, how deliberately the women thought about what they found themselves projecting into their fictional characters. Indeed, it is Henke rather than the authors who finds the link back to childhood traumas, and infers that the fictional characters' experiences stand in for those of the author. In some cases, Henke has help from an author's autobiography, but we are all aware how "fictional" such writing is anyway. Henke makes still more links, and spells out the traumatic implications of events she reads about, using psychoanalytic trauma theories that the authors were not necessarily aware of.

Colette, Henke's first author, is a case in point. Interpreted by Henke, it's clear that Colette was traumatized by Willy's emotional and physical abuse:

> Incarcerated in a cluttered Parisian flat and treated like an invalid, the youthful Colette succumbed to traumatic symptoms of psychic numbing and emotional anesthesia by enacting the role of a sick and dying Camille. . . . Not only was Colette prohibited by Willy from giving birth to a child but she was forced to play the diminutive role of his surrogate daughter. (10)

Yet Colette herself sees it otherwise in her mid-life writing. Colette, Henke notes, "could resurrect and redefine these tormented years as a period of expansion rather than enclosure, of voluntary discipleship rather than shameful bondage" (11). Henke has prepared us somewhat for this by deriving Colette's collusion in Willy's schemes from a fascination with her sister Gabrielle's stories of abduction and rape, but still Henke is at pains to understand Colette's version: "Only the evocation of traumatic neurosis

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


could explain Colette's obsessive need, at the age of sixty, to reenact the decade of conjugal bondage that she ironically labels her period of apprenticeship" (7). Likewise, the initial traumatic fall from material grace that Henke, following Marianne Hirsch's work, describes is once again veiled by Colette but seen by Henke as in some way leading to Colette's authorial mastery: "In recuperating an infantile subject-position vis à vis a protective maternal and theological matrix, Colette paradoxically asserts her own authorial mastery at the same time that she protests failure, unworthiness and vulnerability" (17). It seems that scriptotherapy in this case involved reconstruction of the past in such a way that Colette could achieve, in Henke's words, "a sense of agency and psychological empowerment that released her from haunting dysphoria" (22). I take up this point in my conclusion.

The case of H.D. is dramatically different. As a British woman, daughter of a Doctor Doolittle, H.D.'s upbringing could not have contrasted more with that of Colette. And yet, as we'll see, the structure of the traumas she suffered has similar elements to Colette's. Henke focuses first on H.D.'s "autobiographical fantasy," *The Gift,* written in 1943 when H.D. was fifty-seven. The bombs then exploding over her Chelsea flat brought back memory of World War I traumas. Henke also uses H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud,* which recounts, in part, her psychoanalysis with Freud. In the case of H.D., Henke mentions two intertwined traumas—her father's "skull-snapping accident" when she was ten years old, and "the great fires and terrible bombing of London" already noted (25). Whereas Colette suffered first from abuse from her husband, H.D. suffered from emotional neglect from her suddenly wounded father. As Henke interprets H.D.'s texts, "The father's sudden anonymity, his impaired sight and limp limbs, apparently shatter Hilda's confidence in the integrated and co-terminous self constructed by the scopophilic gaze of the father priest/protector. Without Daddy's implicit mirror acknowledgment, she can no longer maintain the reassuring illusion of coherent identity" (38). While Henke again sees this writing, which she calls "autofiction," as scriptotherapy, she is at first puzzled by the author's suggestion of fantasies of paternal seduction, but later reads this as standing in for the kind of "emotional deprivation so regularly practiced in nineteenth-century households that it went largely unnoticed in bourgeois society" (40). Again like Colette, H.D. can only be free to "embrace the matrilineal heritage of her mother Helen and her grandmother Mamalie" once she has confronted the childhood traumas in relation to her father. And this she does at the end of *The Gift.*

H.D.'s adult traumas are found in her novels. Central for her are the traumas linked to World War I and to the pregnancies and marriages that

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

occurred during this period. The stillbirth of a child in 1915, together with her husband's leaving, brought on what Henke interprets as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Henke, this order "would slowly be unraveled over the next several decades through the healing mechanism of scriptotherapy" (43). H.D. names Freud as the one who specifically prescribed this writing healing as a cure for H.D.'s writing block. The draft of the novel *Bid Me to Love* "seemed to release H.D. from the stranglehold of post-traumatic stress disorder" (43). What Henke describes as a "therapeutic recovery from the haunting resonances of wartime trauma" includes fantasies of combining the rhythms and echolalias of the mother tongue predating language and the Father's Law—in Kristevan theory, at least—with "a matric male," producing "an integrated and hermaphroditic male-female progenitor" (53).

It's interesting to juxtapose Henke's third and fifth authors, Anaïs Nin and Canadian novelist Sylvia Fraser, while noting the difference of both from H.D. While H.D. may have fantasized paternal seduction, Nin and Fraser were victims of the Father's sexual abuse. However, the situation for each is widely different. Whereas Fraser is the now "classic" victim, badly damaged emotionally by the trauma of her father's abuse, Nin deliberately enacted the fantasy of the father's seduction in adult life. Nin's early trauma occurred at the age of ten, when her father deserted wife and child to live with a younger woman. Embarking on a journey of "passionate longing for erotic union with the Father/God/lover of her dreams," Nin uses her voluminous diary, as she puts it, to "relive my life . . . in terms of a dream, a myth, an endless story" (qtd. in Henke 57, 56). Once again, as for H.D., "the failure of the idealized father of rapprochement to provide a recognizing response is . . . a pivotal issue in the girl's self formation" (57). Unable to identify with her victimized mother, Rosa, Nin avoided the negative bonds of womanhood by "mimicking her absent father—by imbibing his fierce sexual independence, along with his aesthetic sophistication" (62).

However, it seems that Nin's eventual ambivalence about birthing a child she is carrying stirred up her childhood oedipal conflicts to an unbearable extent. Torn between the feminine and the masculine poles, Nin could not opt happily for motherhood. As Henke puts it, Nin relived "the pain of pregnancy-loss in revised aesthetic frameworks until the reiterated trauma could be mitigated, sanitized, and made acceptable to a tormented consciousness" (75).

Fraser too tries to make her intolerable sex abuse "acceptable to a tormented consciousness" through writing her memoir, *My Father's House* and a work of fiction, *Pandora*. Henke quotes Jessica Benjamin's thesis

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


regarding the importance of love for the idealized father as the "magical mirror that reflects the self as it wants to be" (122), and then shows how monstrous it is for the child to have to choose between unspeakable demands and losing the love and protection of the father. In Fraser's case, as Henke notes, "Hypnosis and dream analysis both contribute to Sylvia's gradual rediscovery of the haunting emotional crisis that shattered her infant self." Henke also argues that the process of narrative reconstruction is what "liberates the emotional wellsprings of anger originating in incestuous abuse" (137).

Henke's two final cases—Janet Frame's New Zealand "postcolonial odyssey," and Audre Lorde's "African-American Testimony"—move the reader into new territory. Frame's "life narrative unfolds as a poignant account of female artistic development in the face of harrowing physical and psychological vicissitudes" (83), which include the Great Depression of the 1930s, tragic accidental deaths of siblings, and the global disaster of Hiroshima. Faced with all this, Frame retreats into madness: "Terrified of the specular gaze of a hostile world, Janet succumbs to post-traumatic dysphoria: 'Loss, death, I was philosophical about everything. I still had my writing . . . and if necessary I could use my schizophrenia to survive" (88). Henke goes into a detailed explication of the "symptoms" of schizophrenia to argue that Frame was never, in fact, schizophrenic. A bit later on, and in a way out of keeping with the tenor of most of her text, Henke turns to Judith Butler and Michel Foucault to discuss how Frame is "socially constructed as a schizophrenic subject, an abject being, whose behavior thrusts her into an ineffable 'zone of uninhabitability,'" described by Butler (94). Frame's memoir continues in further volumes to detail her release from the hospital, her psychotherapy to release her from the misdiagnosis in the hospital, and her brief sojourn in Ibiza and Andorra (a love affair, a miscarriage), until "the future sought in Ibiza and Andorra is finally realized in London through Janet's accession to a newly valorized subject-position as artist and bonafide writer" (98). As with Nin and H.D., it is a therapist who suggests writing the story of her traumatic incarceration: "scriptotherapy finally releases her from persistent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder" (99). The chapter ends with Henke quoting her author: "'I repeat that my writing saved me,' Frame tells us in a voice that reiterates the conviction that life-writing can function as a valuable defense against madness and despair" (101).

The case of Audre Lorde seems to me to rest in a sphere even more removed than Janet Frame from the first four writers Henke takes up. The dark-skinned African-American Lorde, daughter to a loving but light-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

skinned mother who refused to confront the harsh realities of an as yet unchallenged American racism, became a lesbian within a homophobic society still based on extreme class divisions. Clearly Lorde is markedly different from Henke's other figures. Lorde does not suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, in the way the other writers do. And in Lorde's case, individual trauma and cultural context are even more closely linked. Whereas for the others, it is the family as gendered social construct and cultural institution that creates the conditions for the subject's "patriarchal" trauma, much of Lorde's trauma is socially produced. She is also the only figure whose personal traumas—suffering racism in a culture also against lesbianism, and losing her first love, Gennie, to suicide as a result of sexual abuse—lead her into political activism on a large scale. In Henke's words, "A poet warrior, she leads a metaphorical army of avid disciples on a passionate crusade to do nothing less than transform the world" (143). Lorde's incredibly brave battle with breast cancer is recorded in her *Cancer Journals*, but it is also in this period that she writes *Zami,* as a way (in Henke's words) "to work through and work out the traumatic events of her youth in order to cultivate an irrepressible energy and a will to live, create, love and teach" (115).

Henke's book introduces fascinating questions about trauma in women's lives, and the possible drive toward creative writing involving "self healing." What interested me most in the book, however, and where I think its value lies, was its showing that across all the national, racial, and generational aspects of Henke's chosen authors—all of which were very clear to me despite Henke not paying that much attention to such differences[3]—very similar family traumas shape the women's lives. In at least four of the cases, it is patriarchal cultural assumptions that permit the damaging of the women; in each case, the mothers are unable to protect the female child. In addition, while the different women respond differently to the similar traumas, all do evidently find some relief in their writing, confirming to a point Henke's theory about "scriptotherapy."

But I thought the theory itself needed more examination. While Henke refers very briefly to now standard definitions of traumatic symptoms, she does not evoke much of the theorizing about witnessing and "testimony," despite this latter word appearing in her title, and despite a thoroughly informed introduction to the project. The theory that Felman, Cathy Caruth, and others advance is the need for trauma to be spoken: spoken, as I understand it, in its actuality of suffering, terror, disorder, violation of all normal human processes and behaviors, to someone who listens. The healing fictions of Henke's authors take a different route. I would have liked

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


her to point this out—to note that scriptotherapy is only one way of dealing with trauma—and further, to explore exactly how this writing, which as Henke shows, so often entails denial of what happened and the invention of narratives that gloss over or rework trauma into scenarios acceptable to the writer, can be described as getting rid of trauma. Is it healing to repress what actually happened, and to construct a narrative that prevents one from speaking the reality of a trauma? As far as I could tell, she raises the question only once, in the discussion of Sylvia Fraser: "But how free can an incest survivor actually be, when the trauma of childhood sexual abuse is repressed like a specter haunting both dreams and waking imagination?" (130). Yet Henke does not proceed to explore her questions, or to discuss differing theories about precisely this question suggested by therapists working with trauma patients—as may be seen, for example, in Laurie Pearlman and Karen Saakvitne's impressive volume, *Trauma and the Therapist.* Henke's statement about Nin is revealing: "All the evidence in Nin's diary suggests the possibility of what today might be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder—or at the very least *a defensive escape into illusion* as a strategy for coping with traumatic personal history" (78, my emphasis). A bit later on, Henke asserts that Nin was "liberated through testimonial narrative," and that "Scriptotherapy proved to be Nin's strongest defense, albeit partial and temporary" (79), but again the issue of what kind of "testimony" this really is, if it is in this form of an "escape into illusion," is not explored. I can see the healing value of alternate narratives, but I do not necessarily find in them a model for dealing with trauma.

Another interesting aspect of the book is that the "scriptotherapy" Henke finds takes place for all the different women at menopause. Mid-life seems to be the moment when the women are ready and able to revisit their childhood and young adulthood family traumas, and work them through in writing alternative narratives. I would have liked Henke to speculate some more about exactly why it is only at menopause that the women are able to bring their childhood traumas into at least semi-consciousness.

Finally, I would have liked Henke to distinguish types of trauma. Colette, for example, endured three different kinds: the traumas of wife abuse; of separation from her mother; and finally, of Nazi occupied Paris, when her third husband, a Jew, was suddenly arrested in the middle of the night. From what Henke says, it seems that only the third trauma was fully brought to consciousness by Colette. H.D. also suffered three kinds: the absence of the father as mirroring; the loss of a pregnancy; and the World Wars. Nin too suffered from the absent father, incest, and loss of a pregnancy. But Audre Lorde's and Janet Frame's traumas were different, and perhaps this needed more emphasis.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

In my view, trauma requires a triadic structure both in its occurrence and in its confronting. In its occurrence, there is the victim, the event, and the unusual psychic processing which overwhelms the affective portion of the brain and makes it impossible for the event to be cognitively processed—unable, then, to be "known." In confronting trauma, there needs to be another triadic structure within which the trauma can begin in some senses to be "known"—that gap between affect and cognition broached, in other words. In Henke's project, relying on Felman's model of "textual testimony," one could find analogies to the triadic structure, although this is not what Henke is especially interested in. But the literary author might be viewed as the first witness, creating herself as a kind of witness for herself through her characters. And second is Henke herself, who through her close study of these women's lives and writings inserts yet another layer of witnessing. One has the sense of Henke undertaking her own scriptotherapy in repeating her authors' traumas, and in working out her possible vicarious traumatization through her writing. Her text, then, is traumatic as well in its very mode of incessant repetition of similar trauma.[4]

*E. Ann Kaplan*

## NOTES

1. Trauma has, of course, long been dealt with in medical and psychotherapeutic contexts. Freud's use of the term goes back to his hysteria studies with Breuer, but it is later taken up in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism.*
2. Henke I think quite rightly decides "not to deal specifically with Holocaust narratives because these poignant testimonies constitute a field unto themselves and require a particular historical purview that should be investigated within a broader political, religious, and philosophical context" (xiii). My only problems with this statement are: first, a worry about the term "poignant" for Holocaust narratives, and second, that I thought the familial traumas Henke does focus on also require a broader historical purview than Henke gives them.
3. Henke largely limits herself to psychological and familial life, attending very little to historical context, or to matters of gender, class, and race as these might bear on traumatic experiences.
4. I do not have room here to explore two matters of further interest: first, the question of "vicarious traumatization," most recently discussed by both Charles Figley in his *Compassion Fatigue* and by Pearlman/Saakvitne in the volume noted earlier; and second, the question of Henke's vicarious traumatization, and its resulting in a traumatic text. Henke has a way of repeating and repeating aspects of the women's traumatic experiences not only within each chapter but in the Introduction and Conclusion. She helplessly repeats, so that it seems that the women's traumas have gotten hold of Henke, just as traumatic experiences get hold of their victims. But this takes me

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


beyond what I can address in a review! In addition, we find symptoms of fragmentation in Henke's critical modality. At times, she turns to post-structuralist (largely French) theory, while at other times she seems to follow modes standard for biography, in which keeping close to the text and interpreting what's found is usual.

## WORKS CITED

Felman, Shoshana. "Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching." *American Imago* 48.1 (Spring 1991): 13–74.

Figley, Charles, ed. *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized.* New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995.

Pearlman, Laurie, and Karen Saakvitne. *Trauma and the Therapist: Countertransference and Vicarious Traumatization in Psychotherapy with Incest Survivors.* New York: Norton, 1995.

Barbie Zelizer. *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998. 292 pp. ISBN 0-226-97972-5, $27.50.

Barbie Zelizer's *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* forcefully combines three areas of study: the history of photojournalism, in the context of which the author chronicles the forging of a new profession through the need to bear witness at the sites of camp liberation at the end of World War II; the history of the reception of the photography of atrocities in the U.S. and Great Britain, and their re-emergence in, and effect upon, the contemporary documentation of genocide; and, at once most beguilingly and most elusively, an examination of how the contemporary conditions of collective memory have changed under the influence of the photography of atrocities. Informed by this triad of concerns, *Remembering to Forget* offers a novel, and finally sobering, perspective on the questions of memory and representation that continue to concern scholars from a host of disciplinary backgrounds.

As Zelizer points out in her introduction, there is to date little scholarship on the interaction of memory and visuality, beyond the crucial insight that visual memory is material in a way that other memories are not, and that images help to anchor the otherwise fluid and fluctuating nature of collective memory. *Remembering to Forget* does not substantially broaden our knowledge of the precise relationship of image to memory, nor does it claim to do so. Instead, but just as importantly, we learn what questions to ask of photography, especially in those cases when images are called upon to bear witness to atrocity. Is the image or the word better suited to bearing

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

witness? In what way, and with what differences, does each perform its task? How, when, and to what end are images co-opted into memory? When does a collective memory formed on the bedrock of images of atrocity lose the capacity to attend to contemporary atrocities? At what point, in other words, do we remember to forget?

Before addressing this last and most pressing of the study's questions, Zelizer offers a compelling history of the evolving relationship between photography and the printed word in America and Great Britain. She argues that the scenes of horror encountered in the Nazi concentration camps forced together two previously unrelated media in an effort to document and bear witness to the apparently unprecedented. Exaggerated tales of horror had been part of World War I, and the earliest accounts of Nazi Germany were greeted with corresponding suspicion. The first depictions of horror to reach the West were of bad quality, inaccurately captioned, of uncertain origin, and scarce; furthermore, the Western press had at first no idea what to do with them. When the U.S. and British journalists and photographers got to Buchenwald, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen, the world was thus ill-prepared to receive their news. Transmitted as eyewitness reports to uphold the credibility and the authority of narratives the press had never before had to convey, it used as its content the chronicle of liberation in a bid to organize the chaotic material encountered on-site. The journalist looked to photography to help bear witness, and for the first time in press history, the image, as the only tool that could do justice to what was being observed, superseded the word.

As Zelizer points out, the acts of bearing witness and of authenticating other journalists' stories by repeating and confirming their findings became more important than the scoop: it became an act of actual moral importance. At the same time, the journalists' eyewitness accounts always also included the limits their purveyors were up against, for the standards of news gathering could generally not be met under the conditions. The tone and mode of reporting offered insufficient strategies for narration, and the prevailing standards of language could not adequately convey the horrors. Like the chronicles of liberation produced by the first journalists to enter the camps, the photographers' pictures only depicted the consequences of Nazism, rather than the Holocaust per se. And yet, as Zelizer shows, the photographs were subsequently published with little regard to the exact date on which they had been taken, the site they depicted, or even the victims shown, and thereby took on a broader symbolism beyond their immediate referential function. This emphasis of the press on the symbolic dimension of images had the following effects: it showed the public the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


atrocities of the war; it eased the shock through a broader presentation; and, by allowing the public to inhabit the role of eyewitness, it offered a model of how to react to the horrors.

Zelizer identifies three phases of memory in which the significance of the photography of atrocities was transformed within the cultural contexts of America and Great Britain. The first, which lasted until the end of the 1940s, saw the proliferation of liberation images in other domains, such as books, films, museums, and art. In the popular realm during this period the act of bearing witness continued to be crucial. The handling of memory in the press was more complicated: on the one, hand the need to bear witness was still strong, but the persisting ambivalence toward photography motivated a forgetting of the atrocities. As time went on, the visual memories became more formulaic, losing much of the complexity they had shown in the first weeks after liberation, especially with regard to the depiction of the various acts of witnessing. Nazi brutality came to be visualized primarily through the depiction of survivors, and what Zelizer calls the "accouterments of atrocity": the empty furnaces, the nooses, and the gas chambers. This change, the author notes, indicates a change in the nature of bearing witness. Simplified, formulaic encounters with the past no longer moved collectives to take responsibility.

The beginning of the 1950s saw an ebbing of memory that would last until the end of the 1970s. When it resurfaced, the cultural landscape had changed, and memory was now called upon to attend to new and ongoing agendas, such as those of cultural identity, technology, and a newly conceived act of bearing witness to the Nazi atrocities. In what Zelizer calls the third wave of memory, photography became the primary carrier of memory. The re-emergence of interest in the Holocaust seeped into all facets of life: it was taught in high school and university classes, and depicted in museums, films, books, video games, and comic books. People who had in one capacity or the other experienced the Holocaust and the liberation firsthand were asked to come forth and tell their stories. By the mid-1990s, the Holocaust had become omnipresent.

Zelizer's last chapter, and to my mind her most compelling, investigates the impact of photographs of atrocities on our ability to comprehend and take note of contemporary genocides. Here she demonstrates that the image of the liberation of the Nazi camps is echoed in the rows of bodies and gaunt faces behind barbed wire in places such as Bosnia, Rwanda, and Cambodia; and that when pictures of atrocities are displayed side by side with more recent reports of horror, our own response to contemporary catastrophe is dulled. Indeed, the recycling, referencing, and echoing of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

photographs of the Nazi crimes lead to a questioning of the very usability of images as historical documentation. Photographs as effective markers for the Nazi atrocities might, the author suggests, have ceased to work as a reminder of the past, even as they co-opt the effectiveness of current attempts at witnessing. Photographs of atrocities, once of overwhelming importance, now threaten to become, in Zelizer's concluding words, "a representation without substance."

There is little I wish to criticize in this book, although a number of things do bear mentioning. There are some minor irritants in the book's layout, and in the author's titles. I would for instance rather not see subtitles running into texts as in "POPULAR MEMORY: THE GROUND FOR CONTINUING TO BEAR WITNESS. For many U.S. and British . . ." This looks messy and unnecessarily playful, and also detracts from the clarity of the subdivisions. Similarly, the author's last three chapter titles, "Forgetting to Remember," "Remembering to Remember," and "Remembering to Forget," strike me as coy, and lack precision on points where utmost clarity is crucial. In this they stand in stark contrast to Zelizer's otherwise clear and convincing prose.

Of potentially more moment is the book's Americocentric focus. While Zelizer states clearly at the outset that her examination concerns American and British photojournalism, her later chapters seem to drop the distinction between British and American memory production and reception, or at best equate them; and on occasion American remembering threatens to become synonymous with global remembering. It might have been helpful, especially in the discussion of the act of bearing witness, to define very precisely the cultural context and the memorial needs and motivations that move the United States to remember. While many of the contemporary sites and texts Zelizer mentions—the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, for instance, or Spiegelman's *Maus*—have indeed entered the global landscape of Holocaust remembrance, this does not mean that they move other cultures, most specifically Germany, to "forget to remember" in quite the same way.

All in all, however, *Remembering to Forget* renders a breathtaking account of the rise and fall of the image as the framing agent for acts of witnessing, and as the effective carrier of collective memories. What we are left with is the suspicion that the photography of atrocities belongs to a kind of present-day propaganda machinery, in which however we ourselves produce the propaganda; and that this machinery consists in our belief that we can in fact remember through the visual images we have all so often rehearsed. What Zelizer teaches us is that these very images have helped us to avert our eyes from the images that are changing our world today. One purs

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

down the book with the uneasy sense that the relentless discourse surrounding memory has in effect replaced memory itself, and that renewed vigilance can only spring from an understanding of our own complacency in celebrating our identities through outdated modes of collective remembrance.

*Caroline Wiedmer*

Susan E. Linville. *Feminism, Film, Fascism: Women's Auto/Biographical Film in Postwar Germany.* Austin: U of Texas P, 1998. 196 pp. ISBN 0-292-74676-2, $30.00.

For those familiar with New German Cinema, Susan Linville's recent book provides a welcome revision of postwar theories about Germany's inability to come to terms with the past, and an in-depth feminist analysis of five auto/biographical films directed by women. Linville explores and then explodes conventional theoretical paradigms for understanding both *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [coming to terms with the past] and Germany's inability to mourn. Basing much of her critique on the widely respected postwar psychosocial research of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, Linville argues that their brand of cultural analysis views the "forceful reinstatement of the traditional patriarchal family" as offering "the only possible antidote to fascism, a politics they metamorphized as 'effeminate' and 'regressive'" (3). For the Mitscherlichs, Hitler represents not a father figure gone mad, but a "variant on the so-called pre-oedipal, phallic mother" (6). By shifting the blame for fascism onto a female figure, and linking German avoidance of mourning to the lack of complete identification with the father, the Mitscherlichs' work serves to reinscribe traditional gender hierarchies, and validate "human male dominance" (9). I found Linville's discussion illuminating, well written and full of fascinating cultural asides, such as a brief digression on the implications of the U.S. right-wing use of the term "feminazi." Linville goes on to show how five auto/biographical cinematic texts, directed by German women, illuminate wholly different models for the process of understanding and mourning the past, as well as for changing the future. While the autobiographical content of the films provides crucial impetus for her analyses, Linville's project seeks to do far more than outline personal histories. For Linville, "German women's autobiographies are acts of self-invention, embodied in stylistically innovative—often reflective—aesthetic forms that serve as powerful critical tools" (19).

Linville begins her discussion with the stylistic innovations of Marianne Rosenbaum's *Peppermint Peace* (*Peppermint Frieden,* 1983), a surprisingly humorous and charming narrative told from the point of view of Marianne,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

a young girl growing up in 1940s Germany, and featuring an appearance by Peter Fonda as an American serviceman. Linville briefly covers the auto/biographical context for the film, which includes the West German peace movement of the 1970s and 1980s. She then points to Rosenbaum's disruption of the "Hollywood filmic paradigm of the camera as a male gaze" (23). Marianne provides the focalization for the film—the spectator sees things from a little girl's eye view, and hears things from her perspective as well. What Marianne sees and hears allows the spectator to criticize "a warmongering postwar mentality that persists in postwar German culture" (29). Linville often makes revealing and relevant comparisons to various films directed by New German Cinema's men. In this instance, she contrasts the camera's controlling high-angle position in much of Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* with the subjective camera work in *Peppermint Peace*. Unfortunately, Linville often relegates these discussions to footnotes and she fails to develop them as much as I wished she would have. Perhaps Linville does not want to burden her analysis with too much attention to the old male canon, but many readers familiar with main stream (mostly male) New German Cinema might gain access to the films of Rosenbaum and others via directors and texts they already know.

Helma Sanders-Brahms's controversial film *Germany, Pale Mother* (*Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter,* 1979), is known to many cinema-goers, in part because it has received much critical acclaim and censure. Narrated by Sanders-Brahms, the film reconstructs events in Germany from 1939 to 1955, telling the story of "an intensely cathected mother-daughter dyad," Lene and her daughter Anna, whom Linville identifies as "Anna/Helma" (41). The title of the film is also the title of a Bertolt Brecht poem "(a)llegorizing Germany as a motherland despoiled by fascism"(57). Linville extends her discussion to cover many aspects of this fiercely personal, melodramatic film. She decodes Sanders-Brahms's text, showing how, although accused of evading history, the film actually addresses both blindness to and complicity with fascism, bringing its "spectators to an awareness that reworking the past is a labor whose resources and contours for women differ dramatically from those for men" (62).

The resources available to the female protagonist in Jutta Brückner's disturbing black and white film *Hunger Years in a Land of Plenty* (*Hungerjahre in einem reichen Land,* 1979) seem extremely circumscribed. This film shows how damaging the present and past might be for a teenage girl in postwar Germany. "By focalizing the 'hunger' of an emotionally disturbed adolescent girl," *Hunger Years* points out "the relationship between disordered consumption and postwar German political identities" (64–65).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Linville adopts various stances toward the text. She discusses womanliness as masquerade, the female gaze, eating disorders among young women, German postwar consumerism as "a blockage of the process of coming to terms with the past," and the implications of *Hunger Years'* address to the "Third World" through the inclusion of a black Algerian character (66). I still remember my confusion, and even distaste, when I watched *Hunger Years* as a graduate student in German ten years ago. I wondered about the sequences between the protagonist and the Algerian, not only about possible interpretations, but also literally about what I saw happening in the film. Linville provides viable and astute insights into *Hunger Years;* she guides her readers into a realm of possible interpretations, and suggests ways the filmic text might speak to spectators.

In her analysis of Margarethe von Trotta's well-known *Marianne and Juliane* (*Die bleierne Zeit* [The Leaden Time], 1981), which tells of a sister's investigation of her terrorist sibling's mysterious death in prison, Linville makes a strong case for "an aesthetics of ambiguity and undecidability that is constructed so as to undermine the epistemological and moral certainty that realism and melodrama are said to imply" (86). I particularly enjoyed Linville's comparison between the protagonists in *Marianne and Juliane* and in Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun.* According to Linville,

> Unlike Fassbinder's specularized female protagonist, von Trotta's appealingly unglamorous Juliane is not naively unaware of the political dimensions of her public and private worlds. A composite fictional character based on Christiane Ensslin (the sister of Baader-Meinhof member Gudrun Ensslin) and on von Trotta herself, Juliane becomes our point of identification for a potent, self-aware encounter with memory, loss, and accountability. (86)

Since the film generated a great deal of controversy, even among feminists, Linville devotes her attention to various reviews. She manages to discuss graciously a particularly hostile response to *Marianne and Juliane,* calling it both "influential and error-riddled" (88), and finally suggests the review's author may have hoped for "a more sympathetic and differentiated portrait of a woman terrorist" (89). Linville's treatment of the critics, the theories, and the texts remains even-handed, reasonable, and readable; in this way, she makes a particularly strong case for the value of postwar German feminist film.

Jeanine Meerapfel's *Malou* (1980) serves as the author's final text for analysis. Linville examines the film's "autoethnographic aesthetic in its interrelated multicultural, gynocentric and emotionally engaged dimensions," which is related to Meerapfel's own "complex heritage as an

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Argentine-born, part French, part German-Jewish women with a Catholic working-class mother and a cultured haut bourgeois father" (110–11). Linville dwells on the memorabilia belonging to Malou, the mother of the protagonist, and demonstrates how those objects come to signify a specifically gendered text. She goes on to discuss melodrama's relationship to the tango, and the film's relationship with Latin American melodrama, showing again how these German women directors acknowledge and intersect with New World Cinema.

Linville writes in a scholarly yet clear and accessible style. She critiques without devaluing, and she speculates fruitfully on how and why a text might have been produced in a certain way. As I mentioned earlier, I often wished she would elaborate on cultural asides she treats only briefly, or on comparisons to, or contrasts with, other films. But perhaps that is praiseworthy as well—to leave the reader wanting more instead of less. While a filmography is included, Linville might have mentioned where her readers can acquire the films she cites, if they are not lucky enough to have access to a sophisticated neighborhood video store (Facets and Kino are video companies that come to mind). Two types of spectators would probably seek out films such as those Linville discusses. One is the student or scholar of world or German cinema, autobiographical film, or feminist film. This person might have been exposed to the biographies of the directors. The other goes to the theater to see significant films, and has probably seen *Germany, Pale Mother, Marianne and Juliane,* and films directed by Wenders and Fassbinder. This spectator would experience these texts as being about Germany, but not necessarily as autobiographical. Both types of viewers will find Linville's work illuminating. Any college course in German cinema, or in autobiographical or feminist film would benefit from including *Feminism, Film, and Fascism* on its reading list. Linville's exemplary discussions serve as perfect models of academic discourse. For those interested in more of the autobiographical information Linville touches on, she provides a complete bibliography. For the spectator with a general interest in world cinema, Linville provides a hint of the complexities involved in representing the past for New German filmmakers, and especially for women filmmakers.

*Jans B. Wager*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Juliane Schober, ed. *Sacred Biographies in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia.* Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1997. 366 pp. ISBN 0-8248-1699-4, $49.00.

The biographical genre is at the very core of the Buddhist tradition, and one of the most prominent and potent modes for propagating the Buddha's teachings. Indeed, the Buddha's own life serves as the paradigm for all Buddhists, monks and laity alike; through his life story, the fundamental philosophical and ethical truths known as the dharma are conveyed and humanized. But as the essays in this fine volume attest, the biographical genre in Buddhism extends considerably beyond the specific life of the Buddha, and incorporates the lives of individual monks, lay persons, and kings—serving, as Juliane Schober puts it in her preface, for "mapping diverse realities onto one another," through which "local cosmologies are integrated into universal ones," and the pristine Buddhist ideals and modes of practice of the past "are recreated in the present lives of others" (ix).

This is an unusually consistent and integrated edited volume, such that one can quite easily read it from start to finish and in the process gain a comprehensive sense of the place and function of biography in Buddhism. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary breadth of the essays as a whole is both impressive and a welcome change from the dominant focus on words and texts in Buddhist studies. But it also becomes apparent by the end of this volume that this multiplicity of contextual and critical concerns is really a necessity, because biography in the Buddhist tradition is not simply a textual or narrative affair, but includes painting, sculpture, ritual, and even architecture. A basic set of themes is echoed in many of the essays—the individual life as part of a continuum, the historically specific moment seen in the context of both the past and future, and the continued active presence of the Buddha in the world—approached from different angles and with different critical concerns, certainly, but in such a way that the individual nuances of the essays compliment rather than clash.

The essays in Part One, "Buddha Biography in Textual and Visual Narratives," provide a conceptual framework that lays out some of the basic themes and structures of Buddhist biographies. Frank Reynolds explores the mythical dimension of the Buddha's life story as recorded in several *jātaka* texts, and argues that Buddhists constructed the Buddha's biography in such a way that taken as a whole, it systematically provides the basic paradigm for the entire Theravāda tradition, linking all of the Buddha's past lives through a continual lineage that serves to orient and legitimate religious, social, and political life. Mark Woodward analyzes the intersections between the Buddha's biography (and those of his followers) and the doctrinal and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

philosophical veins of the tradition, and he suggests that the Theravāda tra-
dition essentially denies the specifics of history through a biographical
genre that presents what he calls an "open-ended cosmology." In the
process, the Theravāda tradition is saved—and here Woodward invokes
Mircea Eliade—from the terror of history, the meaninglessness of the spe-
cific and the individual. In the final essay of Part One, Robert Brown focus-
es on the visual representation of the Buddha's prior lives on certain ancient
Southeast Asian and Indian monuments. He argues, somewhat controver-
sially but quite persuasively, that such images are not in fact "illustrations"
of textually expressed stories—that they are not intended to "tell" a story at
all—but rather serve an iconic function, by which he means that they were
there to be venerated and interacted with as, in effect, manifestations of the
Buddha in the present.

Part Two broadens the focus to include the extended biography of the
Buddha, and the ways in which the Buddha's own life story was expanded
to encompass and inform the biographies of a wide variety of his followers,
from the monk on the path toward enlightenment and nirvana, to the lay
person on the path to more positive karma and a better rebirth. The
Buddha's individual life story, then, is very much a collective matter, a life
in which a wide range of beings—indeed, theoretically *all* beings—partici-
pate. John Strong focuses on two of what he calls the Buddha's "karmic
companions"—the Buddha's wife, Yaśodhara, and his son, Rāhula—and
argues that to attempt to understand the Buddhist development and use of
the biographical genre in terms of the individual is to apply an inappropri-
ately Western concept of biography: "Karma is not only individual, it is
collective as well, and as a result, karmic biographies treat not only of the
'histories' of identifiable karmic continua over a series of lives, but also of
ongoing karmic nexuses" (114). Reginald Ray specifically examines the
biography of Nāgārjuna, the 2nd-3rd century Indian master and saint, and
in particular the incredible longevity that is attributed to him in a variety
of accounts of his life. Ray suggests that this trope of longevity cuts across
the multifaceted tradition of Buddhist saints, and serves as a "relatively sta-
ble and enduring structure that was integral to the way in which Buddhist
saints were identified, defined, and understood in India" (140). Consonant
with Strong, Ray sees this emphasis on longevity as a kind of binding device
within Buddhism, one that emphasizes not the parts, but the whole. Given
this emphasis on the whole, Jonathan Walters appropriately returns to
themes raised by both Reynolds and Brown, and analyzes the spread of
Buddhism in the early post-Aśokan period, and the role played within the
expansion by textual accounts of the Buddha's biography and the visu-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and ritual practices associated with them. Walters argues that the confluence of texts, stupas, and bodily relics creates a Buddha biography that extends through both time and space, and that projects and informs what Walters calls "a universal society whose members are the participants, past and present," in this biography (176).

Part Three, "The *Jātakas* and Biographies of Kings," is concerned with the function of the Buddha's biography within the royal realm. In the first essay, Forrest McGill analyzes a set of paintings of the Buddha in his life as King Vessantara. McGill meticulously traces the social and ritual context of these paintings, paying close attention to the actual function of such paintings in the religious world of the lay people who commissioned and participated in them. Thomas Hudak discusses the literary and political machinations of a single *jātaka* story, a development that effectively enlisted monks, courtiers, and lay people in the active production of one line of Buddhist biography that served to sacralize the biography of a seventeenth century Thai king, Narai. In the essay that follows, Paul Johnson turns our attention to the nineteenth-century Thai king Mongkut (of "Anna and the King" fame), and to the complex ways in which his life—and particularly the Western world's representation of this life—was at one and the same time based on a traditional Theravāda paradigm (that of the Buddha) and shaped by Western projections of science and rationality. Through its focus on the intricate web of cultural influences that converge at the figure of Mongkut, Johnson's essay nicely reminds us that the life story recorded in a biography is often, as in Mongkut's case, only one version of the life, and that because it is often negotiated among varying and sometimes competing interests, we must therefore, as Johnson urges us, not lose sight of the fact that such a life story is always "firmly located in the time, place, and interests of its production" (251).

The final set of essays in this volume turns to Buddhist biography on the local level. The particular virtue of this group of essays is that it provides a glimpse into the modern biographical context in the Buddhist tradition, and the manner in which what is perhaps the dominant theme of the volume—the ways in which biography creates a link between the past, present, and future—plays itself out on the ground. Schober looks specifically at the famous Mahāmuni image in Burma, and demonstrates that this image at once draws local participants into the universal Buddhist cosmology by essentially removing the contingencies of time and space, while at the same time mapping the Buddha's life onto the specific temporal and spatial context of upper Burma. James Taylor's essay deals with the forest monk tradition in Thailand, and the specific biography of one of the most

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

prominent Thai saints, Aajan Man Phuurithatto (1870–1949). According to Taylor, Man's biography marks a renewed emphasis on the hagiographical genre in Thailand, and has served to reinvigorate the forest monk tradition there by explicitly placing the local forest monks in a lineage that extends back to the Buddha himself. In the final essay, Gustaaf Houtman provides a particularly apt conclusion to this volume. Although he too focuses on an individual, the Burmese meditation teacher and accountant-general U Ba Khin (1899–1971), Houtman demonstrates that this is a biography in which the individual life is not in fact individual at all, but rather a kind of paradigm that, like the Buddha's own life story, explicitly transcends the particulars of time and space. In the case of U Ba Khin—and for that matter, in the respective cases explored in each of the essays in this volume—the individual's life is placed not only in a Buddhist lineage but also in a national history, in such a way that what we might separate out into the spiritual, the social, and the political realms condense into one biographical stream.

This is, to be sure, a distinctly Buddhist view of the world, an epistemology fundamentally informed by the workings of karma, and a weltanschauung in which all beings and all events are inextricably intertwined. There can be no purely individual life story, because as the Buddha himself so pointedly remarks in the *Samyutta Nikāya:* "Oh Bhikkus, it is not easy to find a being who has not formerly been your mother, your father, your brother, your sister, your son, or your daughter" (II: 189).

*Jacob N. Kinnard*

Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild, eds. *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature.* London: Saqi, 1998. 342 pp. ISBN 0-86356-727-4, $55.00.

*Writing the Self* is a rich and varied collection that brings together the proceedings of the second Meeting of European Teachers of Arabic Literature (EMTAR), held in St. John's College, Oxford, April 5–9, 1995, though strangely this is nowhere recognized in the published volume. This work consists of two introductory pieces—one by the Egyptian novelist Edwar Kharrāt, and the second by Robin Ostle—followed by twenty-four chapters by European and Arab scholars. As with any collected proceedings, the contributions are uneven. What are we to make of "chapters" of only two pages set among others that are twenty pages in length? In the case of the present volume, however, the overall quality of the scholarship is quite high, making this a worthwhile read for specialists in Arabic literature and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

scholars of autobiography alike. If, as many scholars have noted, the study of autobiography has made only a belated entry into the field of Western literary criticism, this is even more the case in the Arab world. For this reason, many of the chapters in this volume are truly ground-breaking, and the work as a whole is certainly the most detailed, broad-ranging study of modern Arabic autobiography to date.

The editors have grouped the collected papers under three headings. The first is entitled "Voyages of Self-Definition," since several of the nineteenth-century Arabic texts which most closely approximate the Western concept of autobiography were motivated in part by the authors' travels in Europe. While some of these writers retained the form of the classical Arabic travel account, others developed wildly idiosyncratic literary responses to the cultural circumstances of the nineteenth century, creating texts that simply defy classification as either Arabic or Western genres. The chapters in this section will provide non-Arabists with an excellent introduction to these fascinating literary encounters with the West, including accounts by two Egyptian travelers to the World Exhibitions in Paris; the intriguing autobiography *cum* "Critique of the Relations between the Sexes" by the Lebanese Christian writer Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq; and the memoirs of the Jewish "father of Egyptian theater," Ya'qūb Sanū'. Sadly, many of the cited Arabic passages are left untranslated, though the pieces should on the whole still be accessible to non-specialists.

The next sixteen chapters are given the heading "Autobiography from Theory to Practice." They range from detailed analyses of individual texts, to comparative essays treating topics such as the portrayal of childhood, the narrative starting points of autobiographies, and prison narratives. One real contribution of this volume is to give a sense of the breadth of the modern Arabic autobiographical tradition. These essays deal with texts and authors —male and female—from Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. The combined bibliographical information in the notes to these chapters is likewise a very significant contribution. The essays also present texts that cover the full spectrum of memoirs, diaries, autobiographical novels, and autobiographies, to use Western nomenclature.

The final section, "The Female Voice," includes three chapters specifically focused on women's writings, though references are made throughout the book to the most famous Arab women autobiographers, such as Fadwa Tūqān, Nawāl Sa'dāwī, Hudā Sha'rawī, Latīfa al-Zayyāt, and Bint al-Shāti'. One of the themes raised here concerns the boundaries between novels with strongly autobiographical characteristics and works that openly proclaim themselves to be autobiographies. Here, as throughout the volume, the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

focus is on autobiographical texts with high literary aspirations. The more direct autobiographical works, such as that of Fātima Rose al-Yūsuf, the famous actress and later founder and publisher of Egypt's most prominent critical political journal, are nearly ignored, as are the memoirs of other prominent political and social figures. (Is there a reason not to deal with the autobiographies of Anwar and Jihān al-Sādāt?) Thus the quandary that attracts the attention of several of these scholars concerning the relationship between autobiographies and novels is, at least in part, of our own making, since we continue to relegate more straightforward autobiographical writings to an area beyond the pale of literary research. The broader scope of the question is lost if we deal only with the "high literary" examples.

Another theme that appears in several chapters in this volume is the relationship between the public and private self, and the traditional "reticence" of Arab authors to expose the private self through the vehicle of autobiographical writing. Unfortunately, most of the authors here write from a viewpoint in which the Western concept of public and private self is treated as an ahistorical, unchanging given. In only one of these chapters is the question even raised as to whether Western categories of thought are wholly appropriate to analyzing Arabic "selves" as expressed through Arabic literary conventions. In addressing the writings of the ubiquitous Philippe Lejeune, Boutros Hallaq writes:

> Lejeune grounds himself in Western thought of the past two centuries—that is to say since Western modernity established that the individual, the individual subject, is history's driving force. *Because of this, must we disregard other forms of modernity which perceive the world differently?* Particularly places which, at important moments in their histories, feel threatened by a certain type of Western modernity." (201, my emphasis)

*Writing the Self* will certainly be obligatory reading for scholars of modern Arabic literature. Beyond that, however, it is hoped that it will circulate broadly among scholars of autobiography, for only in the act of comparing the norms of Western autobiography with the conventions of other cultures can we set in relief some of the peculiarities and specificities of the Western tradition(s). This volume is not only a significant step forward in the study of modern Arabic autobiography, one that may well spark new studies in other dimensions of the genre, but also one that may inspire much needed comparative studies with other traditions.

*Dwight F. Reynolds*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Scott E. Casper. *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999. 456 pp. ISBN 0-8078-2462-3, $49.95 cloth; ISBN 0-8078-4765-8, $19.95 paper.

This scrupulously researched and broadly conceived study of biography in nineteenth-century America traces the cultural work and publishing history of a genre that was enormously popular. Circulation records from local lending libraries, just one of a wide array of sources Scott E. Casper explores, reveal that diverse groups of readers, both male and female, thrived on reading biographies. That the biographies they embraced were neither good literature nor good history cannot, according to Casper, explain contemporary scholars' wholesale neglect of the genre. Noncanonical works ranging from dime novels to pornographical texts have been the stuff of cultural studies for some time. Why not biography as well? Casper argues quite convincingly that while scholars have mined other popular nineteenth-century genres largely for their subversive, counterculture impulses, they have largely ignored biography because it championed the dominant values of the society. In eulogizing their subjects and shaping them into idealized models to be emulated by their readers, nineteenth-century biographers tended to write success stories that valorized patriotism, celebrated self-made men, and buttressed the capitalist ethos.

What more is there to say, then, about a genre whose nineteenth-century messages have held so few surprises? As it turns out, quite a bit. For one thing, women and men looked to very different sorts of models. And the models shifted over time, with contestations over the purpose of biography invariably accompanying the shifts. Taking issue with the narrowly didactic notion of character that prevailed in the early republic, mid-century romantics insisted that the special "genius" of their subjects should influence readers to find their own genius through inspiration instead of emulation. In probing the differences between inspiration and emulation, between genius and character, Casper deftly reveals important changes in biographical writing. At issue also, for both writers and readers, was the degree to which biography was a branch of history, and thus an integral part of the national narrative. Toward the end of the century, biography came to be defined as a specific genre within literature, and evaluated on the basis of its literary merits. A good work of biography was expected not only to tell the unvarnished truth, but to do so with all the polish and coherence of a novel. It is telling that James Parton created a brilliant career as a biographer—of Thomas Jefferson, Aaron Burr, Andrew Jackson, and Horace Greeley, among others—precisely when biography came to be

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

viewed as a genre that was neither a branch of history, nor a forum for didactic messages.

In Casper's hands, biography becomes an innovative lens for viewing the incessant transformation of nineteenth-century American culture. Even Parton's engaging brand of biography, with its romantic emphasis on individuality, was implicitly challenged by literary realism and social Darwinism. And yet, although Parton was still recognized at the turn of the century as an important contributor to the genre, Elizabeth Ellet, author of *The Women of the American Revolution* (1850), was derided in *The New York Times* upon the book's reissue in 1900 for writing a who's who, or "mug-book." Even some fifty years after the book's initial publication, the *Times* still failed to appreciate that Ellet had combined the scholarly standards of her own time with feminine sentiment to claim the national past for women.

The sheer range of biographers Casper explores here is stunning. As a student of both popular and local culture, for instance, he takes up the simple mug-books derogated by the *Times*. These collected sketches of local farmers, businessmen, and politicians were published by subscription firms and ordered in advance of publication by the proud subjects themselves. Emerging in the 1880s along with county histories, these biographical albums were a lucrative business that publishers argued were democratizing the entire genre of biography. It was a point well taken. Volumes of collective African American biography began to appear in the aftermath of Reconstruction, and proliferated after 1900. The subjects, often former slaves, demonstrated significant intellectual achievement in the face of remarkable adversity. Casper even covers campaign biographies, including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Life* of the Democratic presidential candidate Franklin Pierce. Hawthorne's participation in a genre characterized by formulaic writing was essentially a bid for the consulship at Liverpool. Not surprisingly, the *Whig Review* despaired that in this great age of democratic literature so distinguished a novelist would lower himself to accept this form of literary patronage. But Hawthorne, Pierce's old college friend, could write very well even for this narrowly partisan political genre, thereby providing Casper with a revealing moment that blurred the lines between biographical forms.

Casper's analysis is complex and wonderfully subtle throughout. Perhaps the most striking contribution he makes to our understanding of this history of the genre lies in his emphasis on readers, who, he reminds us, might read a biography both didactically and romantically. Not content to rely on reader-response theory, he dips into readers' diaries to map out the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

links between biographical texts and readers' experiences. Michael Floy, for example, a pious Methodist businessman who was influenced by religious revivalism, and who wrote extensively about his reading experiences, focused for a time on subjects who devoted their piety to communal endeavors. As Floy's reading took a more secular turn, however, an incipient romanticism began to color his evangelicism. Julia Parker, a teacher who serves as Floy's female counterpart, focused on female biographical subjects, both to entertain herself and to provide her students with examples of female intellect and virtue. For patriotism, however, she relied on male subjects.

As the reader profiles suggest, this is a book about cultural production and reception, and as such it encompasses the discourse of readers, critics, and editors. Thanks to the comprehensiveness of its approach, and given the paucity of other scholarship, it is pathbreaking in the fullest sense, a work that, as the author puts it, "proposes what a cultural history of the genre might look like" (15). Imposing order on a hundred years of a genre that had diverse audiences and competing objectives is a difficult feat, and Casper's canvas is so complex and so ambitious that the reader at times is lost in a profusion of sources and standpoints. Nonetheless, when future scholars carve out parts of his portrait and examine them in much greater depth—as they undoubtedly will do now—they will remain indebted to him for his pioneering survey of biography in nineteenth-century America.

*Norma Basch*

Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice, eds. *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History.* Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1997. 308 pp. ISBN 0-7748-0673-7, $75.00 cloth; ISBN 0-7748-0641-9, $25.95 paper.

Could a "woman" be a "historian"? Editors Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice pose the question in their introduction, prompting us to read the ten essays in this collection as answers, and as explorations of those two socially constructed terms "woman" and "history." Affirmative answers, needless to say, since this is a collection about the creation of historical memory by historians who, as women and Canadians, were themselves making history. "Yes," all ten essays suggest, "women" could be and were "historians," before proceeding to illustrate just what *kind* of women historians one found making history in Canada between 1870 and 1970.

This is not a history book; rather, it is a collection of essays about the making of history, a historiography. As such, it is a significant addition to

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the shelves of those interested in Canadian history, as well as Canadian studies, and women's and gender studies. The essays are organized in loosely chronological fashion. The first two sections—"Community Building" and "Transitions"—focus on historical research outside academic institutions. The last two—"the Academy" and "New Departures"—explore women historians, their research, and its impact inside academic institutions. Boutilier and Prentice broaden their definition of history by necessity: the formal definition of historical practice, developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as something carried out by academically-trained historians in institutional settings, excluded women historians in very real ways, as Prentice effectively proves in her article "Laying Siege to the History Professoriate." At first glance, the cover photo of Miss Ethel Hurlbatt surrounded by her male colleagues in the 1922 McGill convocation procession seems to prove women's presence in the academy during the early decades of this century. However, the essay in which it appears—Prentice's own—demonstrates a systematic exclusion of women from permanent positions in English-Canada's own premier research institutions. The University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan come off slightly better than McGill, Queen's, and the University of Toronto, by the way.

If Boutilier and Prentice broaden the definition of history by necessity they also do it deliberately, as a way of questioning the distinction between amateur and professional as applied to the term "historian." Boutilier's own contribution focuses on Sarah Anne Curzon, an amateur, accomplished and relatively well-known historian. Curzon was a founding member of the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto, and an early activist for women's rights in Toronto. Boutilier argues persuasively that Curzon's "resurrection" of Laura Secord—the woman who crossed enemy lines to tip off the British to an oncoming assault in the 1812 war—as an "imperial" and "national" heroine brought women's rights issues to the forefront of political discussion in Canada during the 1890s. Through Laura Secord—heroine housewife and mother—Curzon illustrated the relationship between women's work and the preservation of Canada as a British nation and argued that women as well as men were "nation builders" and "makers of history."

The choice of words is Boutilier's, of course; they echo the book's title and speak to all the women profiled in this collection. In turn, the collection's title echoes that of the *Makers of Canada* series of history books, published between 1903 and 1908. Women were neither the authors nor the subjects of the *Makers of Canada* series. Here, by contrast, in terms of both

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the history they "make," and their determination to participate in historical inquiry despite the obstacles, the women profiled in these ten essays are all makers of history and of historical memory.

Ostensibly, this collection focuses on English-Canadians—defined here as women who "worked in English," and who were either born here or spent their careers here (9). It's a broad definition that allows for the inclusion of profiles of lesser known Canadians. No detailed accounts here of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, for example; rather, Terry Crowley's nuanced portrait of Isabel Skelton allows us to glimpse a woman who is able to see the shortcomings of her famous middle-class contemporaries, whose "artistic refinement" and "gentle training" robbed them of a better sense of Upper Canada "at closer range" (176). It is a bit of a stretch in a couple of places to consider the women historians as makers of English-Canadian memory. Megan J. Davies' and Colin M. Coates' account of Kathleen Wood-Leigh, a blind medievalist who gained recognition for the quality of her work and humanity at Cambridge, is one example. Another is Jean Barman's strong portrait of Constance Lindsay Skinner, who was born in the Canadian North, but spent most of her life and career in the States. This is one of the most striking articles in the collection, I think, because Barman both links and separates the private and the public persona, and by quoting from letters and papers gives us a taste of the fiery Skinner. We hear about her work—how, to support herself, she juggled work for Yale University Press, wrote fiction and poetry, did some editing on the side, and occasionally revised the work of male academics to make it readable—and about her personal struggles—to support an infuriatingly dependent mother, and to maintain her pride and independence in a world where women were expected to marry. "I know you hoped I would say yes to him," Skinner writes to her friend and sometime lover, arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefannson, "& indeed I did try to do it. I am not able. You must forgive me for it and help me get onto my own feet with my work—which I love and is all I have or can hope to have in my life & give me some happiness" (148).

Such glimpses into the person and personality of the historical memory makers profiled appear throughout the collection—in the form of black and white photos from private and archival collections, or detailed conversational footnotes. I expect that Prentice and Boutilier encouraged such additions, and the collection is the richer for it. For example, Barry Moody includes a visual selection in his article on Maritime historian Esther Clark Wright that enlivens, complements, and counterpoints his textual account. Wright's capable determination—she earned a Ph.D. in economics from

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Harvard before her husband, while keeping house for both of them—is revealed in Moody's text; her wit, humor, and subtle elegance are revealed in the illustrations. A friend's watercolor of Wright at her desk, one hand on her garden spade, the other on the typewriter keys, is absolutely priceless.

One profile functions in its entirety to provide glimpses into the individual behind the historian. Terry Crowley's exploration of Isabel Skelton provides a sensitive account of the way she juggled her responsibilities as wife, mother of two children, and historian. She was educated at Queen's, receiving her M.A. there and the medal for History in 1901. Through close analysis of her work, and its relation to her personal life and situation—she was the wife of Oscar Skelton, one of the youngest men to achieve the rank of Macdonald Professor at the University of Toronto, and then Undersecretary of State for External Affairs—Crowley provides an overview of scholarly publishing in Canada, of marital negotiations between two sensitive and intelligent individuals, and of the range and breadth of Isabel Skelton's historical, biographical, and political writing.

Figured in this collection are communities of women as well as individuals. In a strategically—and I think appropriately—inclusive genre Linda Ambrose argues for the importance of community records kept by members of the Women's Institutes, and looks specifically at the Ontario Women's Institutes. Citing controversy in academic ranks as to the rigor and the significance of what became known as the Tweedmuir books in the 40s and 50s, Ambrose (whose *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario* was published in 1996) invites her readers to acknowledge the dedication of Institute chroniclers, who recorded community history without professional or formal recognition.

Elizabeth Smyth analyzes closely two other historical genres through which women chronicled their own lives and those of their community: the annals (permanent records of community events) and necrologies (accounts of the Principles by which a Sister lived, offices held, and the circumstances of her death) of women religious. Focusing on three Ontario communities—the Religious of the Precious Blood, Mount Olivet, Toronto; the Ursulines of the Chatham Union; and the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto—Smyth argues that women religious were involved in historical research that extended beyond "purposeful histories" for their particular communities. Most obviously, they established educational institutions (the Chatham Ursulines founded Brescia College and The Pines, for example), and were among the first women historians to present historical research about women at scholarly meetings of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association. I particularly liked the way Smyth quoted

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


from and commented directly on specific aspects of the Sisters' research. At one point she cites Mother St. James, who in 1940 stood pondering the grave of Marie de l'Incarnation: "As I stood on the rock of Cape Diamond," she wrote, "I understood more about Canadian history than I have ever been taught from textbooks. Here, I found, was a woman's will projected across three hundred Canadian years right before my wondering eyes." Mother St. James goes on to note how fitting it is that Marie de l'Incarnation is buried beside the first group of Ursulines, since one woman could not have done it alone."

The same might be said of this engaged and engaging book of historiography. As a collection of ten articles by both men and women, and edited by two Canadian women historians of different generations, this collection illustrates—in content and method—the range and depth of historical memory making in English-Canada. It belongs on the shelf beside another touchstone of the discipline, Alison Prentice's own *Canadian Women, a History* (Harcourt Brace, 1988, 1996).

*Nathalie Cooke*

James Olney. *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998. 496 pp. ISBN 0-226-62816-7, $35.00.

James Olney's new book focuses mainly on "three principals," who "stand like colossi each fully capable of giving his name to the age in which he lived and wrote: Augustine, presiding spirit of the Catholic Middle Ages; Rousseau, child of the Enlightenment yet prime mover of Romantic attitudes; Beckett, comic genius of a world in ruins." From these points of reference, Olney graphs the entire history of Western life-writing: "the three taken together establish a tradition of writing, founded by Augustine, radically altered by Rousseau, concluding (for the moment) in Beckett, that is the ground against which, during sixteen centuries, innumerable figures and transformations have played themselves out like variations on a theme" (xi). His underlying argument, made explicit only in the conclusion, is "that memory and narrative, together and alike, are the two major epiphenomena of consciousness, the dual defining conditions of our being human and not something else" (417). Olney's choice of his principals reflects the self-consciousness and energy with which they acted on what Olney sees as a deep and universal human impulse, what one might call "the autobiographical imperative." Indeed, he is drawn to these three in part because life-writing was virtually their life work. Olney is primarily interested, then, in meta- and mega-autobiography.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Some will question the inclusion of Beckett, on the grounds that his medium was not autobiography, strictly speaking. But Olney argues for an inclusive definition of life-writing, preferring the terms "autography" and "periautography" (to denote writing about the self rather than the life), and he contends that Beckett's career was decisively shaped by his recognition that he had only memory and himself for subjects. (There's a sense, too, in which Olney's trinitarian schema requires Beckett to complete it.)

In any event, more than half the book concerns Beckett. And in view of the fact that Olney sees Rousseau as a modernist or even a postmodernist *avant la lettre,* over three quarters of the book is devoted to the predicament of the modern(ist) life-writer, who feels the autobiographical imperative very intensely—in direct proportion, one might say, to his awareness of the futility of the enterprise. On one level, then, much of the book is a paean to a kind of existentialist hero (my term, not Olney's), the autobiographer as Sisyphus. This is clear in a remark about Beckett, Kafka, and Giacometti: "In advance, they were altogether clear eyed about the impossibility of the task they entered upon, yet they chose the impossible and not once but over and over again" (282).

Within the limits of his *donnée* (to which I will return), Olney has written a remarkable and masterful book. As a study of his principals, it is impressive both in its extensiveness and its intensiveness. Olney does not limit himself to the obvious, familiar works, like Rousseau's and Augustine's *Confessions,* but rather explores a range of works across their oeuvres: Augustine's *City of God* and *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* Rousseau's *Dialogues* and *Reveries,* and Beckett texts too numerous to mention (dramatic as well as narrative). Olney's contribution to the criticism on these figures reflects careful scholarship and resourceful contextual and intertextual reading. And he takes advantage of his narrow focus to do a good deal of close reading, dwelling on key phrases or considering alternative translations. The book is clearly a labor of love, the product of long years of immersion in and reflection on its central figures, and it is elegantly written. Without showing off, Olney has accomplished a tour de force of criticism, producing an exemplary work of literary, biographical, and philosophical analysis. To read it is to tune in on the thinking of a very intelligent and learned reader as he pores over a series of challenging texts.

Like the texts it analyzes, *Memory and Narrative* is ruminative and recursive, returning again and again to issues or passages already discussed to shed new light or make some new connection. (This will please some readers and exasperate others.) The length and recursiveness of the book may seem self-indulgent to some; it is perhaps better to think of it as Self-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

indulgent. Olney is not so much indulging whims as meditating in a rather leisurely way on a very large and complex topic, the constitution and linguistic representation of the Self in Western life-writing.

As someone whose primary interest is in American life-writing (and life-writing in a somewhat less literary register), I welcomed those passages that discussed the problematics of memory and narrative in a broader range of life writers, including Henry Adams, Gertrude Stein, Richard Wright, Maxine Hong Kingston, Nathalie Sarraute, Christa Wolf, and Ronald Fraser. Anyone interested in life-writing and memory will profit from Olney's discussion of different kinds of memory in Augustine; his discussion of recent theories about the relationship between memory, dreaming, reverie, and identity; and his dazzling discussion of the problematics of the first-person pronoun.

Olney's overview of Western life-writing will strike some as familiar and unobjectionable. It will strike others, however, as familiar and *therefore* objectionable: in its traditional periodization and its exaltation of three writers, all male, it is subject to the usual objections to the endorsement of any exclusive canon. Using these indisputably great figures to represent the arc of the development of life-writing over such a long span of time is bold not in its originality but rather in its apparent conservatism. Olney's account is not explicitly political; he has not set out, it seems to me, to write a reactionary book, but rather to establish the inescapability of these three figures for anyone who undertakes life-writing as a deliberate literary enterprise. (Although Olney never cites Harold Bloom, his interest in intertextuality and his view of the relation among the three principals is reminiscent of Bloom's "anxiety of influence.") Yet the book obviously goes against the grain of much contemporary criticism of life-writing, which concerns itself with the marginal, the multicultural, and the multimedia (the sub- or non-literary).

While no one could deny the inherent problematics of representing a life or a self in writing, Olney's focus on the "insufficiency of language" leaves out a good deal of what has counted as life-writing over the period in question. At times, indeed, it seems that Olney is as invested in the greatness of Augustine, Rousseau, and Beckett as literary artists as he is in their significance as *life*-writers. Thus, he acknowledges that it doesn't finally matter very much to him whether or not obsessively repeated details or motifs in Beckett's work have their origins in his life: "The memory I am concerned with, then, is that of the artist and the work—and the memory of the artist for the work—more than it is the memory of the man" (390).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Those who look to Olney for a new slant on the history of, or nature of, self-life-writing will perhaps be disappointed; they may wish that he had more often drawn back from his central figures to address his titular concerns with reference to other figures. Those who come to his book for insight into Augustine, Rousseau, and/or Beckett, however, will be richly rewarded.

*G. Thomas Couser*

Trev Lynn Broughton. *Men of Letters, Writing Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography in the Late Victorian Period.* New York: Routledge, 1999. 213 pp. ISBN 0-415-08212-9, $29.99.

Leslie Stephen starts what is commonly called *The Mausoleum Book* (1895)—his eulogy of his recently deceased wife Julia, written for his children—by turning promptly to himself: "I wish to write mainly about your mother. But I find that in order to speak intelligibly it will be best to begin by saying something about myself" (qtd. in Broughton 6). And he continues to speak mostly about himself throughout the text.

James Anthony Froude, looking back on the intense controversy generated by his four-volume *Life of Thomas Carlyle* (1882–1884), reflects in sadness, "I loved him better for the feeling which he had shown. He was human; he had his faults like other men. . . . I supposed that what I felt myself would be felt by others, when they had taken time to consider, but I did know that the first impression would be a painful one" (qtd. in Broughton 130).

These auto/biographies by men of letters writing about women, about other men of letters, and ultimately about themselves provide the test cases for Trev Lynn Broughton's important, intensely interesting exploration of male life-writing at the close of the nineteenth century, a book that demonstrates how the interrogation of masculinities can illuminate life-writing, and, conversely, how the study of male life-writing can open new terrain for the study of men. Strikingly, Broughton's work enlarges our awareness of auto/biography and of the construction of masculinity, not by extending the canon, as has been productively done in recent years by incorporating, for example, female, working-class, and subaltern texts, but by returning to that apparently most exhausted of topics, the lives of white male authors enshrined in the multivolume Life and Letters.

Assuming the Foucauldian model of masculinity as a construction, in contrast to the pervasive essentialist view of maleness, Broughton is attentive to historical specificity in examining the social formation of the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Victorian man of letters. Furthermore, the study is informed by a laudable understanding that even the bearded Victorian authors, not to speak of their male acolytes and the male readers of these biographies, were occupied not only with their own perks and powers, but also with the fragility of male authority. Moving beyond the simple model of omnipotent patriarchal oppression, Broughton focuses on the ideological and social work performed by male biography. She sees that "the late Victorian sage, the hero as man of letters, was in many ways a self-consciously textual—and ultimately a biographical—construction" (63), albeit a construction that then, as now, seemed about to crumble. And she illustrates the function of these texts in "the regulation of literary masculinity" (84). The study keeps at the forefront the task of literary biography in working to resolve the contradictions of this "literary masculinity," the conflicts particular to that paragon of male subjectivity for the Victorian age.

Thus, Broughton's question is never "What was the biographical Truth?"—was Carlyle really impotent?—but rather, why were late Victorian readers so obsessed about the sexual performance of a Victorian sage? Or, why was Leslie Stephen so occupied not only with his professional success, but also with his success as a husband?

In engaging such questions, Broughton's perception of Victorian masculine sexual issues is always acute, especially in noting why certain male troubles were problematized at the end of the century, and why, particularly in the case of Carlyle, these matters generated intense public controversy. The author is nicely attentive to a perhaps no longer neglected aspect of gender studies, the history and construction of heterosexuality. Emphasizing that in the writing of the Victorian Life and Letters "one of the stakes was heterosexual masculinity" (25), she demonstrates how both Froude and Stephen were occupied with a specific problematization of heterosexual male sexuality for the late nineteenth century, the contradictions in the Victorian ideal of the "man of letters as husband" (84). Here we see the gender conflicts, familiar to male academics, endured by the man of letters who works at home between the "manliness of letters" and the "womanliness of domesticity" (76), the conflicted authority of the domesticated patriarch. Although such authority anxiety is, of course, brilliantly limned in the writing of Stephen's youngest daughter, the temptation to employ Virginia Woolf as a major source is wisely resisted in favor of attention to Stephen's own writing. That the literary man might not make the ideal husband indicates that at the end of the nineteenth century the Marriage Question was as problematic for men as for women, and that men, too, were chafing at the bonds of matrimony—as indeed they had been through the century.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Broughton also pays due attention to the society's obsession with "homosexuality" at century's end. Relating Froude's text to the contemporary homoerotic autobiography of John Addington Symonds is most provocative, as is her exploring the vexed homosocial/homoerotic bond of the biographer to his subject. The tension of homosocial intimacy, inherent in the transmission of male lives to other men through the duty-bound biographer, is seen in the anguish and fantasies of homosocial domesticity that, as Broughton shows, plagued a remorseful Froude in the aftermath of publication.

Indeed, the "'sexualization' of masculine biography" that troubles life-writing in our own time is shown emerging in this late-Victorian moment (21). Froude and Stephen exemplify the Victorian obsession, famously noted by Foucault, with the continuous confession of sexual "truth." Carlyle's impotence, the scandal of the Froude life, is set in several illuminating social contexts. Quite originally, Broughton recovers the pathologizing of male impotence, its construction as disease in the late nineteenth century. In another unexpected turn, the Froude-Carlyle controversy is situated within the Victorian legal "redefinition of marital cruelty" that included the new legal construction of the "impotent husband" (106). Carlyle's erectile dysfunction is also linked to larger cultural anxieties about decadence at the end of the century, as well as to the contradictions inherent in Carlyle's early Victorian ideal of "muscular celibacy" (145). And such occupation with the sexual powers of the author as husband certainly follows from the Victorian equation of virility with literary power that continues into our own time.

Finally, Broughton productively fuses gender with genre. She transfers the insights of feminist criticism to the study of male writers, noting that the habit of silence or repression crucial to women's writing also structures that of men in the nineteenth century, as in the witting forgetfulness in Stephen (57) and the Carlylean valorizing of silence as the manly attribute of reserve. But Broughton also points to specifically male narrative structures and male fantasies—some specific to the Victorians, some more general to patriarchy—as structuring these life-writings. In this way, she reveals, in Leslie Stephen and in others, "the bourgeois narrative of redemption by heterosexual marriage; the patriarchal story of the exchange of women" (70).

*Herbert Sussman*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Paul Robinson. *Gay Lives; Homosexual Autobiography from John Addington Symonds to Paul Monette.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. 428 pp. ISBN 0-226-72180-9, $30.00.

Paul Robinson's *Gay Lives* epitomizes the recent trend in gay studies to supplement our knowledge of gay history through literary works. During the nineties we have received a huge bounty of academic work detailing the lives and works of such Victorian "gay" literary figures as John Addington Symonds, Walter Pater, Henry James, and of course, Oscar Wilde. Robinson's purpose is to analyze the lives of the gay writers who, from the Victorian period to the 1980s, "make attraction to their own sex a central theme of their autobiographies" (ix) The thoroughness of his analyses makes this work especially useful as a crucial disseminator of gay social history, both to academics and to curious students of all ages. His lucid prose and his willingness to summarize even the most basic of contemporary academic controversies—the "essentialist" versus "constructionist" debate, for example—make his study accessible to the widest possible audience.

In his Introduction, Robinson wisely takes time to explain the rationale of his choices, especially why he chose not to include lesbians, and why he limited his choices to works by British (six), French (three), and American (five) writers. He asserts three major themes—"identity," "masculinity," and "solidarity"—although his greatest emphasis by far is on the first. He tends to view masculinity, his second theme, as many of these writers themselves did: through a conventional lens, rather than allowing for a more androgynous, free-flowing take on gender. But that's a minor quibble when juxtaposed to the complex, sensitive analyses he gives us of these men's views of their "identity," analyses so detailed as to make us occasionally wish that he did not rake quite so thoroughly through the texts.

Since all fourteen men are white, Robinson wisely adds an epilogue which emphasizes African Americans and Latinos, though he never mentions Asians. Using Samuel Delany and Richard Rodriguez as archetypal models of these respective races, he concludes that in America it is much easier for blacks to accept their homosexuality and lead unconventional lives, an over-simplified conclusion which may be true for certain writers, but which is at least suspect as far as the general population is concerned.

To use Robinson's own term, the criticism to which his study is most vulnerable is "presentism": judging the past by the standards of today. In other words, try as he might to be objective, Robinson cannot help but sympathize with writers like Christopher Isherwood, who could accept themselves as unequivocally homosexual. He finds it hard to resist being

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

critical of writers like Isherwood's friend, Stephen Spender, who as a young man enthusiastically embraced homosexuality, but who ultimately balked at the idea of having sex with men. Robinson also tends to side with men who sought and established long-term relationships, even though a strong recent countermovement in the gay subculture honors as a legitimate lifestyle those who, for whatever reasons, do not have such a relationship. On the other hand, rather than viewing these tendencies as a prejudice, it is probably more useful for us to see them as categories or yardsticks, which make it easier for us to make comparisons. To his credit, Robinson includes some details of his own life, especially when analyzing such contemporaries as Andrew Tobias, Martin Duberman, and Paul Monette, giving us a sense of where he is coming from on these issues. Yet he might have expressed a bit more compassion for those of his subjects who could not benefit, or took a long time to benefit, from the more liberating environment of the post-Stonewall period.

Robinson wisely begins with that vastly underrated Victorian literary figure John Addington Symonds (1840–1893). Though married and the father of four children, as a result of his intensive study of Greek culture, Symonds finally decided to break with the Oxford model that encouraged only non-sexual intimacy between men. The self-portrait of Symonds in his *Memoirs* resonates at a deep level for many gay men. For example, though contemporary high school students are exposed to many generalizations about the current gay subculture, they rarely receive information about any homosexual tradition which either integrates sex and affection in romantic relationships, or encourages bonding with a trustworthy older man, from whom they might receive valuable intimations about choices available to them concerning what kind of gay man they might want to become.

On the other hand, Symonds was hardly liberated by our current standards, which do not condemn recreational sex. Precocious in the sense of having explicit sexual fantasies about sailors at the age of eight, Symonds was not only alarmed by such fantasies, he was repulsed by his many opportunities for schoolboy sex at Harrow because there was "no refinement, no sentiment, no passion. Nothing but animal lust in these occurrences." Even though, through the lens of "presentism," current gay men might see him as a foolish prude, Symonds was still true to his own convictions, and after suffering through several highly frustrating platonic affairs with young men, he broke off sexual relations with his wife—to her relief—and managed to consummate some affectionate, sexual liaisons in Switzerland and Italy. Sadly these *Memoirs* are out of print.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Robinson next takes on *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson,* E. M. Forster's mentor. Here Robinson makes up for what is lacking in Forster's biography of Dickinson—any mention of his sexuality at all. Robinson also does a fine job with Isherwood, a very complex subject who has written five autobiographical works. Limiting himself to just two—*Lies and Shadows* and *Christopher and His Kind*—Robinson still gives us a substantial portrait of this pioneering figure. Two minor disagreements. First, Isherwood is not as celebratory as he is portrayed. He deliberately downplayed his sexual experience to try to forestall envy from the majority of his readers who, at the time his novels were originally published, would have had little or no chance of emulating his relatively glamorous romantic/sexual life. Second, Robinson projects too much romanticism onto Isherwood's actions during the last months of his relationship with his young German lover, Heinz, who he unsuccessfully tried to prevent from being arrested and conscripted by the Nazis. A more apt phrase to describe Isherwood's feelings in their final months together would be dogged loyalty.

Robinson's final two portraits of Englishmen are of J. R. Ackerley and Quintin Crisp. Both accounts contain strangely negative references by Robinson to masturbation. In the Ackerley chapter, Robinson describes it as "the sexual haven of the narcissist," and in the Crisp chapter as "the egomaniac's ideal sexual activity," despite the fact that both writers refer to the act positively While somewhat appropriate in the context of these men's lives, by including no positive references to balance these negative phrases, especially in the light of contemporary culture's hearty endorsement of the act—with or without a partner—Robinson unintentionally presents it as an appropriate refuge only for the emotionally damaged or self-absorbed.

Robinson does a good if somewhat hurried job with Andre Gide and Jean Genet—both very complex personalities to explore in twenty-five or so pages. He might have expanded those portraits, and dropped the somewhat painful look at Julien Green. Robinson concludes with five Americans, admitting that the modern trio of Tobias, Duberman, and Monette can be exasperating to both younger readers and himself, because they punished themselves so much by taking so long actually to come out.

The best discovery here may well be Donald Vining, whose *Gay Diary* (1933–1954) gives us a portrait of a man who despite his arrests took responsibility for his sexuality, and managed to remain upbeat about it for his entire life. Ultimately, Robinson's book may well stand out as a work which will lead gay men to discover writers, like Vining, who can show everyone, in ever-greater complexity, who gay men are and what they could become.

*Jim Brogan*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Chambers, Ross. *Facing It: AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998. 145 pp. ISBN 0-472-10958-8, $32.50.

It is impossible for me to imagine the last two decades without th HIV/AIDS epidemic. The creative responses of HIV/AIDS activists to th loss of tens of thousands of people, and to the rampant prejudice that mad the society slow to act, have profoundly changed American society. Th epidemic, more than any other public health crisis I can think of, has bee shaped by rhetoric as much as by medical research. One mark of this is th AIDS has its own literary genre—which includes the most famous play o the last decade, *Angels in America.* AIDS writing is largely written by mi dle class gay men who have used literature to forge links between a ma ginalized community under siege and mainstream society. Ross Chambe has written a book of literary criticism about AIDS autobiographies, th diaries written in the face of an AIDS diagnosis. In *Facing It,* Chambe explores the relationship between the authors of AIDS autobiographies an their readers.

Autobiography written about living with AIDS is largely the story o the author's dying, and is not easy material for critics. The first-perso account of someone's tragic demise from AIDS has a compelling pow that proclaims its truthfulness, as if to refute the need for a critic's tools. some cases, AIDS autobiography is written by people who are also high trained cultural critics, their work marked by wit and politics and a goo grasp of theory. For instance, Artist David Wojnarowicz, whom Chambe mentions, proclaims in his "Postcards from America," "WHEN I WA TOLD THAT I'D CONTRACTED THIS VIRUS IT DIDN'T TAK ME LONG TO REALIZE THAT I'D CONTRACTED A DISEASE SOCIETY AS WELL." Eric Michaels, a young anthropologist dying fro AIDS, in his diary referred to hospitalization as "a Foucauldian horro show," and called AIDS "the disease of a thousand rehearsals" (94). Her Guibert, in his video diary, films his illness and dying, including an expe iment in suicide that mirrors the double-blind principle in experimenta drug tests. And Tom Joslin uses the landscape of a New Hampshire winte to portray the homophobia of his parents as they struggle with his dying o AIDS. Chambers explores in depth these last three AIDS diaries: Michaels' *Unbecoming* (Sydney: EMP, 1990); the video diaries of Guibert, *La pudeu ou l'impudeur* (1990–1991); and Joslin's videotape *Silverlake Life: The Vie from Here* (New York: New Video, 1993). These works are set in Australia France, and the United States, respectively. The inclusion of video diaries as autobiography is an innovative approach, stretching the reader to imagine scenes, not merely dialogue, and to assess criticism of works less available

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

than books. Chambers selects these accounts to explore the experience of reading or viewing AIDS diaries.

At the outset, Chambers raises the important question of criticism in an epidemic. Does it have value? Should we be doing something else with our time and energy? He defends criticism, claiming that it is vital because rhetoric is an important tool in the battle against HIV/AIDS. He explores the various reasons why an author writes his story—the narratives Chambers considers here are all written by gay men—in the face of fatal disease, or why a reader might wish to read about it, and the role of the critic, who writes with no expectation that the author will survive to respond to him.

His thesis is that AIDS writing is an act of revolt. To write in the face of one's disease, with KS lesions scrawled across the body, is an act of revolt because one is choosing to confront rather than merely succumb to disease. Revolt requires countless acts of resistance. For instance, Michaels, who researched Central Australian Aboriginal TV, writes of resisting the imposed passivity of television viewing, "You don't watch television in a hospital; you surrender to it. I haven't quite yet" (124). In fact, Michaels assumes the role of the "difficult patient" as a strategy to resist playing the role of a victim. While Chambers sees AIDS writing as an act of revolt, he considers the experience of reading AIDS diaries as an act of mourning, one that allows the reader to participate in the anxiety of the author's project.

Chambers's own style of literary criticism is heavily influenced by postmodernism. His subtitle, *AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author,* refers to the much quoted statement by Roland Barthes—"the death of the author marks the birth of the text"—but takes on new meaning when positioned within AIDS discourse, when the authors are not only dying as they write, but their writing is about their dying. The title, *Facing It,* refers to AIDS criticism—How should critics approach AIDS autobiography?—as much as to the autobiographer's act of bearing witness to what is happening to him. Chambers problematizes the positionality of the authors as well as the "truths" they proclaim. He is aware of the many ways truth is constructed, and that the act of witnessing is not pure. He puts postmodern ideas to good use, illuminating AIDS diaries by providing us with rich and multiple interpretations of the texts and videos. This produces for the reader a meditation on reading that occurs alongside of Chambers's analysis of the diaries.

In emphasizing the autobiographer's social context, Chambers points out the irony of, for instance, Michaels writing a diary with hopes of its publication. Michaels researched and became a member of the Warlpiri of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Yuendumu, an Aboriginal community. For the Warlpiri, mourning the dead does not allow for autobiography, since honoring the dead requires the community to erase any mention of them for generations. Occasionally, we find dualisms appear in Chambers's analysis, despite his postmodern approach. One dualism is that of witnessing over victimhood in his chapter, "Dying as an Author." Chambers maintains that AIDS autobiographers choose to bear witness rather than become victims of their circumstances, forgetting that witnessing, in general, does not necessarily protect one from victimhood.

In some AIDS autobiographies, such as Michaels's diary, we find the imperative to readers: Do Something. It is the urgent demand of an author who knows that by writing he can only bear witness, and can do little about prevention. In the face of this demand, one must think twice about writing criticism. In a diary entry that Chambers does not cite, Michaels describes himself the month before he died as poring through the pages of the AIDS issue of the journal *October,* disappointed with the ways the theoretical approaches of the authors for the most part impeded activism. "I began to feel I was trudging through a swamp of discursivity," Michaels writes, "sinking deeper and deeper into a too-predictable rhetorical mud." He pondered the editor's question, "Can art fight disease, save lives?" And asked a more specific one of postmodern criticism, "Can deconstruction (e.g., Foucault and Derrida derivations) save lives, fight disease?"

Where some might find it too much to ask of criticism, Michaels presses on, only to discover that "the articles themselves progressively veer away from that question" (106), and retreat from powerful critical positions and AIDS activism, offering instead the usual critiques of patriarchy. He considers the possibility that these failures might actually contribute to a victimization of gay men. "We already know nobody likes faggots, and hardly expect late capitalism to show much sympathy," he remarks, "Worse yet, despite a sustained attack on victimization . . . I wonder if a sort of liberal humanism infects these analyses, which, by exempting gays from criticism, in its own way renders us passive, and so victims in terms of our own arguments in the end" (106). Writing criticism of autobiographies like Michaels's, which are sharply critical of criticism while charging it with a heavy social responsibility, is a formidable project.

In *Facing It,* Chambers takes on this charge, and provides us with a poignant analysis of AIDS autobiography in the first decade of the epidemic, one that honors the subjectivity and politics of AIDS autobiographers while avoiding victimizing those who suffer from AIDS. Chambers's text is not overtly political. Upon putting down his book, I did not feel like

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

storming the FDA. I suspect this would disappoint Michaels, even though Chambers has continued the conversation begun by *Unbecoming*—in fact, I found Chambers's discussion of the book so interesting that I immediately got a copy. Some may wish for Chambers to broaden his approach by examining autobiographies about other illnesses—for instance, cancer—or to extend his analysis of AIDS writing beyond the work of gay men, or beyond a Western context. But these suggestions point to very different projects. Chambers's book is a meditative exercise for critics similar to the reflexive exercise of autobiography. It is literary criticism at its best. To cast the reading of AIDS diaries in a framework of mourning, as Chambers does, is helpful.

I have not written criticism about the AIDS epidemic for several years now. I realized this in a deeply emotional way when I set out to review this book. What I didn't expect was the ways in which a work of literary criticism, beautifully written and contemplative, could deepen my awareness of all that we mourn now.

*Julien S. Murphy*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# REVIEWED ELSEWHERE

Contributing editors William Bruneau, Brian Cassity, Michael Fassiotto, Gloria Fisk, Douglas Hilt, Corey Hollis, Noel Kent, Gabriel Merle, Jeanette Smith, and Paula Willoquet-Maricondi provided the excerpts for this issue.

Publications reviewed include the *Chronicle of Higher Education, Film Quarterly, The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), *Guardian Weekly, Los Angeles Times Book Review* (*LATBR*), *Le Monde des Livres, New England Quarterly, The New Yorker, New York Review of Books* (*NYRB*), *New York Times Book Review* (*NYTBR*), *Opera News, Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France, Screen, Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*), *Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (*WP*), *The Weekend Australian,* and *The Women's Review of Books.*

**Addams, Jane**

*A Useful Woman: The Early Years of the Life of Jane Addams.* Gioia Diliberto. New York: Scribner, 1999. 388 pp. $26.00.

"Diliberto's biography . . . offers neither fresh revelations nor original interpretation, and is based on the scholarship of other historians. Factual errors . . . also litter the narrative. Still, Diliberto, a gifted writer, has written a lively, accessible biography that will introduce readers to Addams, the woman. . . . We still await the magisterial biography worthy of this remarkable woman."

Ruth Rosen. *LATBR,* Sept. 5, 1999: 4.

**Albee, Edward**

*Edward Albee: A Singular Journey.* Mel Gussow. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. 448 pp. $20.00.

"Gussow has the advantage and disadvantage of knowing his subject at close range, having given him many favorable reviews at both Newsweek and The Times, published lengthy profiles of him, and had him as a guest at his house. Such a nexus was necessary to gain access to Albee's private papers, to various friends and lovers, and to the umbrageous playwright himself. On the other hand, hard-nosed criticism of Albee's work is kept to a minimum here. Still, this is an honorable enterprise that avoids adulation, even if it keeps the warts in somewhat softened focus."

John Simon. *WP,* Aug. 16, 1999: 32.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Anderson, Edith**

*Love in Exile: An American Writer's Memoir of Life in Divided Berlin.* Edith Anderson. South Royalton, VT: Steerforth, 1999. 408 pp. $29.50.

"Edith Anderson's memoir rescues the form. Her account of her experience is embedded in the history of our time and is told in a true voice, honest, passionately loving, witty and enchantingly youthful."

Helen Yglesias. *Women's Review of Books* 16.8 (May 1999): 1, 3.

**Anderson, Perry**

*Perry Anderson: The Merciless Liberty of History.* Gregory Elliott. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998. 340 pp. $39.95.

"Gregory Elliott seeks to understand [Anderson's] intellectual achievements in light of his political commitments. He charts Anderson's often torturous political evolution." This is "the finest full-length study of Anderson's work.

Andrew Gamble. *TLS,* July 23, 1999: 25.

**Annenberg, Moses and Walter**

*Legacy: A Biography of Moses and Walter Annenberg.* Christopher Ogden. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999. 615 pp. $29.95; Can$41.00.

"Ogden . . . was given untrammelled access to family, friends and papers. He has done Walter proud, but he is not deferential, and he treats squarely Moses' [Walter's father] putative criminal behaviour. He slides a little too fast over the suicide of Walter's son and the attempted suicide of his only other child, a daughter, which leads one to suspect that a little less chasing of the almighty dollar and a little more family life might have been a good thing. *Legacy* is also an account of family life deep within the Jewish aristocracy of wealth."

Elizabeth Nickson. *Globe and Mail,* Sept. 25, 1999: D18.

"Ogden is a Time correspondent whose decidedly unauthorized biography of Pamela Harriman, 'Life of the Party,' was the biggest unmasking since Toto pulled back the curtain shielding the Great and Terrible Oz. Here he draws on extraordinary access to Walter Annenberg and to his family's papers to fashion an elegantly written account that is sympathetic without being fawning."

Richard Norton Smith. *NYTBR,* July 25, 1999: 7.

**Assing, Ottilie**

*Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglass.* Maria Diedrich. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999. 480 pp. $35.00.

"Maria Diedrich's 'Love Across Color Lines' explores in depth Douglass' 28-year relationship with Ottilie Assing, a German journalist and intellectual. Diedrich makes a persuasive case that this long friendship was in fact

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

an intimate love affair that Douglass and Assing maintained in spite of Douglass' marriage to a black woman who was the mother of his five children. Although previous biographers have acknowledged the importance of Assing to Douglass, Diedrich, a professor of American studies at the University of Münster in Germany, offers a much more elaborate portrait of Assing and of the liaison that was at the center of his life."

Drew Gilpin Faust. *NYTBR*, Aug. 1, 1999: 7.

"Diedrich's analysis, which springs from a microscopic reading of the documents left by Assing and Douglass, offers fascinating, compelling insights into the psychology of race. At times, however, the examination becomes a bit too microscopic as Diedrich labors to explicate the subtlest of nuances in the lovers' letters and articles, straining to find significance where there was none or very little. Still, Diedrich's assessment raises interesting questions about the interplay of public persona and private psychology in Douglass' life, and specialists will find much material to ponder over in these pages, though the general reader may grow weary of the minutiae of Assing's life."

Henry Wiencek. *WP*, Aug. 9, 1999: 23.

**Augustine**

*Saint Augustine.* Garry Wills. New York: Lipper/Viking, 1999. 152 pp. $19.95.

"This brilliant biography, this excellent small book, presents with brio the life of a person who still stirs us, throws us off, speaks to us, heart to heart. Garry Wills' agile mind matches the agility of St. Augustine. He presents his subject with candor and with empathy, avoiding the two great vices of biographers, hero-worshiping and hero-patronizing. His Augustine we would like to meet."

John T. Noonan, Jr. *NYTBR*, July 25, 1999: 9.

**Austin, Stephen F.**

*Stephen F. Austin: Impresario of Texas.* Gregg Cantrell. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999. 493 pp. $29.95.

" . . . Austin has remained something of a cardboard statesman, marched dutifully through generations of history texts. . . . Now Gregg Cantrell, the Rupert N. Richardson Professor of History at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Tex., has produced a biography of Stephen F. Austin that rescues its subject from this pallid fate. By the time Cantrell sketches for us the election defeat of 1836, the reader has gained such a sure and clear sense of Austin the man that his graciousness in the face of this repudiation comes as no surprise."

Paula Mitchell Marks. *NYTBR*, Sept. 19, 1999: 17.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Bacon, Francis**

*Francis Bacon: Hostage to Fortune.* Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart. New York: Hill & Wang, 1999. 637 pp. $35.00.

"We now have . . . [a] survey of the life, 'Hostage to Fortune,' which tells us, in exhaustive detail, just about everything of moment that is known about the tormented story of Bacon as both a private and public figure."

Theodore K. Rabb. *NYTBR,* Aug. 15, 1999: 12.

*Francis Bacon: A Retrospective.* Michael Pettiatt, Denis Farr, and Sally Yard. New York: Harry N. Abrams/Trust for Museum Exhibitions, 1999. 264 pp. $65.00.

"His friend and biographer, Michael Pettiatt, and two art historians, Denis Farr and Sally Yard, build a revelatory composite portrait in 'Francis Bacon.' Yard's cogent essay gives the essential biographical information."

Hilarie M. Sheets. *NYTBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 19.

**Balzac, Honoré de**

*Balzac ou la fureur d'écrire.* Nadine Sadiat. Paris: Hachette Littératures, "Biographies," 1999. 638 pp. F180.

*Honoré de Balzac, 1799–1850.* Pierre Sipriot. Paris: L'Archipel, 1999. 478 pp. F139.

*Honoré de Balzac.* Roger Pierrot. Paris: Fayard, 1999. 606 pp. F180.

[Of the many books published or reprinted in Balzac's bicentennial year, these three are mainly biographical.]

Sadiat's is strictly biographical; based on the general correspondence, contemporary writers' testimonies, and Balzac's sitter's memories. The result: a Balzac "in human scale." First published in 1992, Sipriot's recast and augmented edition is in search of a misunderstood Balzac. According to the author, the founding experiences were: Neglected Son, Mother representing Want, Father meaning Whole. From these data emerges a Promethean Balzac. Pierrot's revised and corrected edition does not conceal the uncertainties remaining about some periods of Balzac's life, and wants to rid the writer of the legends which surround him. Magisterial.

M. Ma. *Le Monde des Livres,* June 25, 1999: 5.

**Bamber, Helen**

*The Good Listener: Helen Bamber, A Life Against Cruelty.* Neil Belton. New York: Pantheon, 1999. 320 pp. $27.00.

". . . in recounting the details of her life, [Belton] offers a history of human rights abuses. . . . Belton may call 'The Good Listener' a footnote to the last fifty years of human rights abuses, but it is far more. Driven by Bamber's

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

passion and his own intelligent assessment of the history, Belton has writ
ten a valuable call to action."

Thomas Curwen. *LATBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 9–10

"Bamber's work, as Belton shows, offers a critical reminder that we nee
not be resigned to human rights violations, rampant though they are."

Sara Ivry. *NYTBR,* July 11, 1999: 2

**Ben Barka, Mehdi**

*Ils ont tué Ben Barka.* Jacques Derogy and Frédéric Ploquin. Paris: Fayard
1999. 456 pp. F130.

Thirty-five years after the events, the authors contribute some new ligh
and some new questions (but no definitive answers) on the mysterious
death of the Moroccan leader of the opposition.

Jean-Marc Théolleyre. *Le Monde des Livres,* July 16, 1999: 6

**Bernal, J. D.**

*J. D. Bernal: A Life in Science and Politics.* Ed. Brendan Swann and Franci
Aprahamien. London: Verso, 1999. 324 pp. £25.00.

A quite favorable review of a collection of essays by, among others, Eric
Hobsbawm, Ann Synge, and Hillary and Stephen Rose. "Three chapters c
near absolute charm detail Bernal's years as an adviser to the British gov
ernment during the Second World War."

Christopher Hitchens. *TLS,* Aug. 20: 1999: 3

**Boswell, James**

*A Life of James Boswell.* Peter Martin. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson
1999. 631 pp. Aus$59.95.

"Boswell is portrayed too often as a minor shrub growing beneath the grea
oak of Johnson, but it is unfair thus to show him always in the shade...
American devotion has dominated Boswell studies. The unearthing and
preservation of his priceless manuscripts cost Ralph Isham his fortune, hi
house and his marriage. . . . Our present author, Peter Martin, is correct t
sense the enduring fascination of this eternal scamp. If your library lacks
good general reference on this lawyer, lecher, snob, social upstart, mor
philosopher, friend to Samuel Johnson, journalist, joker and prince of biog
raphers, buy this book."

Peter Ryan. *The Weekend Australian,* Nov. 13–14, 1999: 11

**Brace, Gerald Warner**

*Gerald Warner Brace: Writer, Sailor, Teacher.* Charlotte Holt Lindgren
Hollis, NH: Hollis, 1998. 260 pp. $29.95.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

"Brace the teacher is still remembered by former students; and one of these, Charlotte Holt Lindgren, has done a superb job of capturing his life. . . . With insight and skill, Lindgren shows how Brace—building on Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, Robinson, and Frost—made a contribution of his own. She restores to life a forgotten novelist who looked through the prism of New England's past."

Norman Pettit. *New England Quarterly* 72.2 (June 1999): 308–09.

**Breytonbach, Breyton**

*Dog Heart: A Memoir.* Breyton Breytonbach. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999. 197 pp. $22.00.

"Citizen of France, most untranslatable of Afrikaans poets, Breytonbach has published his account of his exploration of his African roots in English, a language of which his mastery is by now almost complete. . . . Like Breytonbach's other memoirs, *Dog Heart* is loose, almost miscellaneous, in its structure. Part journal, part essay on autobiography, part book of the dead, part what one might call speculative history, it also contains searching meditations on the elusiveness of memory and passages of virtuoso writing—a description of a thunderstorm, for instance—breathtaking in the immediacy of their evocation of Africa. Though not a work of great ambition, it contains abundant evidence of a creative intelligence of the highest order."

J. M. Coetzee. *NYRB,* Sept. 23, 1999: 51.

**Brown, Addie.** See **Primus, Rebecca.**

**Byron, George Gordon, Lord**

*Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame.* Benita Eisler. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1999. 837 pp. £25.00.

"He was fat, then thin, morose and ebullient, impossibly charming and peculiarly gross. Byron's devastating wit still lifts the spirits. To an extraordinary extent, especially in Europe, he lives on in the collective imagination. Eisler is expansive on Byron's homosexuality [and other sexual complexities], but the "effect of so much sexual revelation is that Byron the poet is sidelined. . . . [and] Byron the European is curiously absent. This is a damaging imbalance in terms of Byron's cultural reputation and personal history. It could be argued that it was only at Missolonghi that Byron found his role."

Fiona McCarthy. *Guardian Weekly,* June 13, 1999: 32.

**Caravaggio**

*Caravaggio: A Life.* Helen Langdon. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1999. 436 pp. $30.00.

"Helen Langdon's 'Caravaggio: A Life' disinters the man and the artist

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

from romantic fantasies spun around him and retells his stormy career from impoverished obscurity to celebrated notoriety. Her readings of his paintings are informed by an intimate knowledge of the period; deftly interweaving artifact and milieu, she re-creates the demimonde so lovingly depicted by him and reaffirms his achievement by placing it in a new and more objective context. Hers is a familiar though risky strategy, if only because what is known of Caravaggio's life would scarcely fill a dozen pages, and her book is occasionally overwhelmed by extended discussions of prostitution or Counter-Reformation piety. Yet, given such a tale of gambling, murder and flight, no one could scarcely complain."

Bruce Boucher. *NYTBR,* Aug. 8, 1999: 5

**Carr, Edward Hallett**

*The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr, 1892–1982.* Jonathan Haslam. London: Verso, 1999. 306 pp. £25.00.

"Jonathan Haslam has produced a workmanlike biography. His researches have been thorough and are unlikely ever to be superseded. In this sense his book will probably remain Carr's definitive biography. . . . [Haslam] does not probe deeply and tends to overload his biography with superfluous detail."

Richard Pipes. *TLS,* Sept. 10, 1999: 3

**Casanova, Giovanni**

*Casanova L'Admirable.* Philippe Sollers. Paris: Plon, 1999. 265 pp. F120.

"Philippe Sollers . . . offers a series of meditations on Casanova in his time and ours. As Sollers discovers, Casanova has a remarkable ability, even over two centuries, to address himself directly to each of us, and this series of reflections on the man and his adventures is . . . very readable, often perceptive."

Robin Buss. *TLS,* Sept. 24, 1999: 30

**Céline, Louis-Ferdinand**

*The Life of Céline: A Critical Biography.* Nicholas Hewitt. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. 360 pp. £45.00.

"Nicholas Hewitt has written an intelligent, sensible biography of Céline which manages also to be original. A conscientious biographer, Hewitt describes the distortions imposed upon his life, but he does not consider them a reliable guide to Céline's work."

Patrick McCarthy. *TLS,* Sept. 3, 1999: 27.

**Chardonne, Jacques.** See **Paulhan, Jean.**

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Clark, Jim**

*The New New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story.* Michael Lewis. New York: Norton, 1999. 256 pp. Can$36.99.

"Lewis' narrative borrows—unconsciously, I suspect—from the prose style of his idol, Tom Wolfe, including Wolfe's blistering dissection of American dialect. . . . But more irritating is the sense that Lewis is failing to tell us something key about Clark. He hints frequently at depression and maniacal behaviour, but never comes out and tells us whether Clark's frenzy of creation might be partially a product of manic depression."

Ann Walmsley. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 30, 1999: D2.

**Coates, Wells**

*The Door to a Secret Room: A Portrait of Wells Coates.* Laura Cohn. Aldershot: Scolar, 1999. 240 pp. £25.00.

A "daughter's memoir which is a study of failure rather than success. . . . Laura Cohn is a professional editor, and she has made an excellent selection of episodes, letters, and architectural details to illustrate the various factors of a convoluted and contradictory career."

Susie Harries. *TLS,* Sept. 24, 1999: 30.

**Corelli, Marie**

*The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli: Queen of Victorian Bestsellers.* Teresa Ransom. Thrupp: Sutton, 1999. 247 pp. £25.00.

"*The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli* is a refreshing and humane new look at Corelli. . . . Ransom narrates her version [of Corelli] with . . . brio . . . and sympathy. She has new material on the enigma of Corelli's birth [and later] metamorphosis."

John Sutherland. *TLS,* Aug. 13, 1999: 36.

**Courthope, Nathaniel**

*Nathaniel's Nutmeg: Or, The True and Incredible Adventures of the Spice Trader Who Changed the Course of History.* Giles Milton. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 388 pp. $24.00.

"Giles Milton, the author of an earlier book on the British explorer John Mandeville, rivals Evan Connell in his ability to tell a good story. He is a tireless researcher and an expert at explaining the sorts of things that have baffled Americans since grammar school. . . . Milton leaves us both yearning for a time when the world seemed full of infinite adventure and appalled by what greed did to such a paradise."

Kevin Baker. *NYTBR,* July 11, 1999: 38.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Crane, Hart**

*The Broken Tower: A Life of Hart Crane.* Paul Mariani. New York: Norton, 1999. 492 pp. $35.00.

"Readers wanting new facts about . . . Crane's life will be disappointed in 'The Broken Tower.' Mariani seems to have written it not in the library but in his study, with Crane's books and the main books about him open on the desk, and without reference, it appears, to the extensive unpublished correspondence. The narrative depends on restatements of poems and published letters, including some of Crane's words (not always with quotation marks) and some of Mariani's. The effect can be exciting, but it can be stilted too, and then the 'Greek tragedy' feels like a television dramatization. There is too much tough talk (as if Mariani thought he could communicate Crane's great transgressive vitality by swearing a lot); and there is something silly about prose paraphrases of Crane's sublime lyrics."

Langdon Hammer. *NYTBR,* July 18, 1999: 9

**Crowley, Aleister**

*Aleister Crowley: The Beast Demystified.* Roger Hutchinson. North Pomfret, VT: Mainstream/Trafalgar Square, 1999. $35.00.

"All in all, a roguish life, and one that novelists, including W. Somerset Maugham and Anthony Powell, have plundered. Hutchinson is good at finding their veiled references to Crowley, and at using the press accounts of the day. It is perhaps regrettable that he does not quote from Crowley himself more often, but as the man was both an execrable stylist and a liar one can see that his own words would be of little use in conveying the facts of his life, which Hutchinson does admirably."

Sarah Harrison Smith. *NYTBR,* Aug. 1, 1999: 15

**Curtis, Charlotte**

*A Woman of the Times: Journalism, Feminism and the Career of Charlotte Curtis.* Marilyn S. Greenwald. Athens: Ohio UP, 1999. 251 pp. $26.95.

"Although her career was cut short by cancer—she died in 1987, at 58—this book suggests that Curtis was not only demoted in her last years at The Times but denied the graceful denouement given men of comparable rank. From the sidelines, and eventually from her sickbed, she kept journals—not reporter's notebooks about her medical treatment, but also about The Times, politics and society—that were not available to the biographer, so it is not clear how much Curtis finally picked up on the big social story she had missed. In the diligent if uninspired account given here, Curtis does not offer much illumination of her time."

Judith Martin. *NYTBR,* Aug. 29, 1999: 3

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Debs, Eugene Victor**

*Harp Song for a Radical: The Life and Times of Eugene Victor Debs.* Marguerite Young. New York: Knopf, 1999. 656 pp. $35.00.

"The book is a weakly structured narrative, an olio of ill-connected and ill-conceived images that neither tell the reader the details of Debs' life nor help interpret the larger public meaning of his career. . . . Young presents nothing of Debs' life after age 39 and is terribly selective on what she includes before that point."

Nick Salvatore. *LATBR,* Sept. 5, 1999: 5.

"Defects and eccentricities are normal in an unfinished manuscript, and Marguerite Young's book is clearly unfinished. When she died in 1995, she hadn't yet done the polishing, revising, and rewriting required for a finished manuscript. More seriously, although the life of Eugene Victor Debs was to be at the center of things, her narrative had not his mature years. In this period Debs led labor in some of its most passionate struggles with industry, formed an American Socialist Party, and the International Workers of the World, went to prison as a war resister, and twice received a surprisingly big vote while running for president, once while serving time in a federal penitentiary. In these years he became a saintly figure for many who felt helpless against American Capitalism at its most ruthless. Lacking the story of this period, Young's book doesn't end; it comes to a shuddering halt."

Russell Baker. *NYRB,* Oct. 7, 1999: 4.

**Diaghilev, Sergei**

*Speaking of Diaghilev.* John Drummond. New York: Faber and Faber/Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 382 pp. $20.00.

"The heart of 'Speaking of Diaghilev'—at least two-thirds of it—comprises 22 interviews with Diaghilev collaborators filmed by the author in the mid-60's for a two-part BBC documentary that against considerable odds he succeeded in bringing to the screen. Although some of the big guns got away—Stravinsky and Balanchine the biggest—the testimony of these other witnesses is both fascinating and invaluable."

Robert Gottlieb. *NYTBR,* Aug. 1, 1999: 7.

**Diana, Princess Of Wales**

*Diana, In Search of Herself: Portrait of a Troubled Princess.* Sally Bedall Smith. New York: Times Books/Random House, 1999. 451 pp. $24.00. Can$37.00.

"Sally Bedall Smith, formerly the biographer of Pamela Harriman and William S. Paley, has now turned her attention to Diana, Princess of Wales, and taken ample note of the activities of investigative journalists and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

paparazzi, not least of the explosive interventions of Andrew Morton and the unprecedented televised royal confessions of both Prince Charles and the Princess. She has done a great deal of sifting, comparing and inferring and her account of Diana's life is as full as any sane person could wish, and even a shade fuller."

Frank Kermode. *NYTBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 7

AND *Diana: The Last Days.* Martyn Gregory. New York: Virgin, 1999. 237 pp. $Can14.95.

"The fact that [Smith] writes as if she is angling for a lifetime of invitations to Highgrove with Camilla Parker-Bowles, ought not to deter us from a serious consideration of her work. . . . Gregory credits his sources at the bottom of every page, something almost unheard of in popular non-fiction. He has chased down every goofball theory and theorist, interviewed the principals, read the reports, talked to the investigators, and pinned Mr. hammed Al-Fayed (commonly described in London as 'friendly and evil' to the wall."

Elizabeth Nickson. *Globe and Mail,* Aug. 28, 1999: D1

**Disraeli, Benjamin**

*The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818–1851.* Ed. Charles Richmond and Paul Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 212 pp. £30.00.

"This is a useful collection of sharply focused essays" by Paul Smith, Todd Endelman, Patrick Brantlinger, and others on subjects including Disraeli's early life, Orientalism, identification with Jewishness, and fashioning of a political persona.

Jane Ridley. *TLS,* July 9, 1999: 2

**Douglass, Frederick.** See **Assing, Ottilie.**

**Doyle, Arthur Conan**

*Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle.* Daniel Stashower. New York: Holt, 1999. 472 pp. $32.50.

"Daniel Stashower's rather jaunty biography returns us to the days of George Gissing and New Grub Street, the age of an awakening mass literacy and of popular fiction magazines like The Strand, the perhaps later connection between Victorian optimism and the stirrings of science fiction.

Christopher Hitchens. *NYRB,* Nov. 4, 1999: 25

**Eddy, Mary Baker**

*Mary Baker Eddy.* Gillian Gill. New York: Perseus, 1999. 714 pp. $35.00.

"Gillian Gill is as entertaining as she is accurate in providing biographical

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

details of Mrs. Eddy's life, and she steers a middle course between hagiographers, who find no fault in her character or ideas, and hostile critics for whom Christian Science is a dangerous cult, neither Christian nor science."

Martin Gardner. *LATBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 4.

*God's Perfect Child: Living and Dying in the Christian Scientist Church.* Caroline Fraser. New York: Metropolitan Books/Holt, 1999. 561 pp. $30.00.

"In 'God's Perfect Child,' Caroline Fraser, formerly on the editorial staff of The New Yorker, does a splendid job of explaining the reasons for Christian Science's rise and fall."

Philip Zaleski. *NYTBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 8.

**Eliot, George**

*George Eliot: The Last Victorian.* Kathryn Hughes. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 384 pp. $30.00.

"Kathryn Hughes has, naturally enough, nothing new to say about the life story, and is too honest to pretend she has, but she writes shrewdly and well, neither patronizing her subject nor unduly attempting to champion her. She is good on the human weaknesses and vanity which underlay George Eliot's proclaimed convictions and certainties, and points out how very little sympathy she would have had with feminist positions today, whether moderate or extreme. Rather sensibly she preferred, whenever she could, to avail herself of the best of both worlds: 'warmth and femininity' when these qualities came in question, and intellectual rigor and masculine superiority when they did not. She found no trouble in separating the two sides of herself—not becoming a 'whole woman.'"

John Bayley. *NYRB,* Oct. 21, 1999: 59.

"Kathryn Hughes' 'George Eliot: The Last Victorian' is clearly an attempt to provide a balanced portrait—neither adulatory nor derisive—but unfortunately it is marred by a heavy reliance on psychological clichés."

Evelyn Toynton. *NYTBR,* July 18, 1999: 15.

**Elisabeth, Empress of Austria**

*Death by Fame: A Life of Elisabeth, Empress of Austria.* Andrew Sinclair. New York: St. Martin's, 1999. 224 pp. $24.95.

"Sinclair, who has also written biographies of Dylan Thomas, Jack London and J. Pierpoint Morgan, seems to think Elisabeth was the forerunner of Princesses Grace and Diana, and attempts to show similarities in their lives. This turns into rambling thoughts about many celebrities, from Elton John to Carole Lombard. Here, as in other parts of the book, Sinclair's sentence structure is as confusing as his premise."

Margaret Van Dagens. *NYTBR,* Sept. 5, 1999: 17.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Erikson, Erik**

*Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik Erikson.* Lawrence J. Friedman. New York: Scribner, 1999. 592 pp. $35.00.

" . . . if [Erikson] mastered any intellectual system, it was Sigmund Freud's. But as Lawrence J. Friedman, the author of 'Menninger: The Family and the Clinic,' shows in his equable, impressively researched biography, there was something genially rebellious about Erikson's American adaption of psychoanalysis."

Mark Edmundson. *NYTBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 11.

**Evans, Gareth**

*Gareth Evans.* Keith Scott. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999. 414 pp. Aus$39.95.

"'The best and most widely respected foreign minister in the country's history'. Scott is surely right in this judgement. Evans's relatively ineffective performance in Opposition has obscured the magnitude of his achievements as foreign minister. . . . All the memoirs and biographies emerging from the Hawke and Keating eras are slack in not focusing on each other's weak points. Hawke's memoirs, for example, claim that as acting foreign minister Evans, in temporary alliance with then defence minister Kim Beazley, strongly recommended military action against the Rabuka coup in Fiji. A book such as Scott's should nail a claim of this sort with forensic ruthlessness, but Scott doesn't even mention Hawke's accusation."

Greg Sheridan. *The Weekend Australian,* Nov. 13–14, 1999: 12.

**Evans, Walker**

*Walker Evans.* James R. Mellow. New York: Basic, 1999. 654 pp. $40.00 Can$58.00.

"Evans's Depression-era photography marked a shift from aestheticism to a head-on look at the realities of American life. If Mellow at times has difficulty keeping his subject in focus, it's not surprising. Evans was an elusive man—instinctively and by contrivance."

John Lownsborough. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 9, 1999: D11.

"How refreshing to read a commentator on art who evokes both what something looks like and, without malarkey, what it signifies. And in his clear way Mellow conveys Evans's considerable complexity."

Nicholas Fox Weber. *NYTBR,* July 18, 1999: 8.

**Fabre, Jean-Henri**

*Jean-Henri Fabre, Maisons, Chemin faisant.* Dominique Autier and Sylvie Astorg. Paris: Ed. Christian Pirot, 1999. 160 pp. F110.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Famous for his *Souvenirs entomologiques,* J.-H. Fabre (1823–1915) was a self-taught scientist. He observed nature in the botanical garden at Sérignan, away from scientific theories. But he met Pasteur, and later Victor Duruy, who gave him the passion to teach. The result was a powerful didactic prose, akin to poetry, which through rigorous though sensitive descriptions, pays tribute to "the infinite fertility of the infinitely small." Jünger, Caillois, Audubon are of his kin.

Marielle Macé. *Le Monde des Livres,* Aug. 27, 1999: 9.

**Frank, Anne**

*Anne Frank, the Biography.* Melissa Müller. Trans. Rita and Robert Kimber. New York: Metropolitan Books/Holt, 1998. 318 pp. $23.00.

"Müller tells us little new about the Frank family, and her Anne, though more turbulent than the saint of stage and cinema, is softer than the diary's angry intimate."

Nina Auerbach. *Women's Review of Books* 16.8 (May 1999): 8.

**Frost, Robert**

*Robert Frost: A Life.* Jay Parini. New York: Holt, 1999. 514 pp. $35.00.

"As a sympathetic overview of Frost's life and work, Parini's biography is fine and useful, lucid if sometimes flat in its prose and level-headed in its judgments. . . . [H]e is for the most part a cogent critic. But few of his remarks will impress seasoned poets or scholars. Nor are readers likely to be struck by Parini's psychological acumen. He seems almost fearful of delving too far down."

Ben Downing. *LATBR,* July 25, 1999: 3.

"Parini's claim seems reasonable: 'My narrative presents Frost as a major poet who struggled throughout his long life with depression, anxiety, self-doubt, and confusion. His family life was not often happy, and he experienced some extremely bad luck with his children. On the other hand, he was a man of immense fortitude, an attentive father, and an artist of the first order who understood what he must do to create a body of work of lasting significance. . . .' But some of these words and phrases—'struggled,' 'not often happy,' 'extremely bad luck,' and 'what he must do'—could be interpreted as hiding something, as if Parini chose them to suppress any rival considerations."

Denis Donoghue. *NYRB,* Oct. 21, 1999: 17.

**Garcia, Jerry**

*Garcia: An American Life.* Blair Jackson. New York: Viking, 1999. 512 pp. $34.95. Can$48.99.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

"*Garcia* is distinguished by a passion for an intelligence about the music. Yet for all its strengths, Jackson's book is not definitive. For one thing, only two of the remaining members of the final incarnation of the Dead . . . allowed themselves to be interviewed. The book lacks sufficient insight into the sources of Garcia's appetite for both success and self-destruction. And its middle section, tracing the rise of the Grateful Dead from obscure Haight-Ashbury hippie band to multimillion-dollar cultural enterprise, breaks no real new ground."

James Adams. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 23, 1999: D

"The Jerry Garcia hagiographic catch basin has been overflowing for years . . . but alas, this book by a credentialed fan . . . provides the definitive subtitle, 'An American Life,' not the definitive study. . . . Blair Jackson's 'Garcia' gathers ample biographical detail from Garcia's history. But then, oh, that prose! We're in the land of gush and cliché here."

Herbert Gold. *LATBR,* Aug. 15, 1999: 5

"Don't be fooled by the title. For the most part, Jerry Garcia is somewhat of a cipher passing through what is really a fascinating and comprehensive biography of a rock and roll band, not a man. The main focus throughout 'Garcia' is on the Grateful Dead, which to Blair Jackson's credit becomes a vital entity that, unfortunately, overshadows the man synonymous with it."

Charles Salzberg. *NYTBR,* Sept. 19, 1999: 2

**Geremek, Bronislaw**

*L'historien et le politique.* Entretiens avec Bronislaw Geremek, recorded by Juan Carlos Vidal. Paris: Ed. Noir sur Blanc, 1999. 176 pp. F129.

These conversations oscillate between considerations on a remarkable intellectual itinerary (Geremek is a major medievalist, a member of the Polish government, and one of the most prominent political men in Eastern Europe), and commentaries on a political involvement which became obvious in the late seventies with the rise of Solidarnosc.

Ph.-J. C. *Le Monde de Livres,* June 18, 1999: 5

**Ghelderode, Michel De**

*Correspondance de Michel de Ghelderode.* Vol. 5 (*1942–1945).* Ed. Roland Beyen. Brussels: Ed. Labor et Archives et Musée de la Littérature, 199 704 pp.

This new volume offers invaluable information regarding the writer's feelings and thoughts during this difficult period of his life.

Jacqueline Blancart-Cassou, *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 99.3 (1999): 550–51.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Gide, Andre**

*Andre Gide: A Life in the Present.* Alan Sheridan. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 710 pp. $35.00.

"[I]t is his consequent familiarity with the social and literary and political web within which this inky spider loomed that gives Sheridan the edge over so many other Gidean biographers. . . . So sensible and sympathetic, as well as powerful and politic, is Sheridan's grand actuality (as opposed, he would have it, to some grand theory) of Gide's life and work that I have but one caveat to enter in an entirely enthusiastic response. His book's clever and provocative subtitle has a resonance that appears to distort a principal aspect of Gide's achievement."

Richard Howard. *LATBR,* July 25, 1999: 2.

**Gillespie, Dizzy**

*Groovin' High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie.* Alyn Shipton. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 416 pp. $30.00.

"'Groovin' High' is the first biography of Gillespie to be published since his death, and the most thorough summary of his life and music, with the exception of 'To Be or Not to Bop,' Gillespie's valuable but poorly organized and often fanciful 1979 autobiography, written with Al Fraser. The English jazz critic Alyn Shipton plausibly argues that the gradual transformation of Gillespie's public image was caused by more than the accelerated pace of jazz evolution and the mellowing effect of middle age."

Francis Davis. *NYTBR,* Aug. 8, 1999: 8.

**Goldhagen, Daniel**

*Le thése de Goldhagen et la vérite historique. L'Allemagne en procès.* [The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth]. Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn. Trans. from English by Denis Berger. Paris: Albin Michel, 1999. 176 pp. F120.

One would have thought that a thesis which boils down to saying that judeophobia played a big role in the perpetration of the "final solution" was no material for exacerbation. Yet, the authors refute it vigorously. Finkelstein's essay, in particular, is a regular ideological indictment. It is also a very questionable one. Obviously, the controversy is not closed.

Nicolas Weill. *Le Monde des Livres,* Sept. 3, 1999: 9.

**Gorky, Arshile**

*From a High Place: A Life of Arshile Gorky.* Matthew Spender. New York: Knopf, 1999. 417 pp. $35.00.

"At the end of 'From a High Place,' you know a lot about Gorky, but you would be fooling yourself to say that you know Gorky. You understand

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

that he was lonely, but you have no window into his loneliness. You would be hard pressed to shed an actual tear at the narrative of his suffering though Spender gives you the feeling that he has at some private time shed tears of his own."

Andrew Solomon. *NYTBR,* July 11, 1999: 8

**Grosskurth, Phyllis**

*Elusive Subject: A Biographer's Life.* Phyllis Grosskurth. Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter, and Ross, 1999. 259 pp. Can$35.00.

"What is most interesting is her persistence in both her personal and professional lives. She is repeatedly frustrated and spurned in what she wants to do. She suffers depression and poor health as a result but, with the exception of her failed biography of Marie Bonaparte, she somehow managed to keep on track. Like all good quest narratives, the story ends with an honest sense of closure."

John Ayre. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 30, 1999: D4-5.

**Hachette, Louis**

*Louis Hachette.* Jean-Yves Mollier. Paris: Fayard, 1999. 554 pp. F150.

Curiously, there was no biography of Louis Hachette, one of the "founding fathers" of Édition Moderne. Mollier fills this gap. While retracing the career and the strategies of this great publisher (including his constant search for monopolies), he makes us plunge into the heart of a system which, over a century ago, revolutionized the world of education.

Alain Salles. *Le Monde des Livres,* June 11, 1999: 7

**Hall, Radclyffe**

*Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John.* Sally Cline. Woodstock: Overlook, 1998. 304 pp. $32.50.

*The Trials of Radclyffe Hall.* Diana Souhami. New York: Doubleday, 1999. 368 pp. $27.95.

"Cline is exhaustive, sentimental, resolutely tolerant of her problematic subject. . . . I respect [Cline for her] refusal to mock her subject. . . . Yet [her] lack of irony also contributes to the earnest, literal-minded approach that makes her book a labor to read. . . . Souhami is succinct, derisive, sometimes witty and relentlessly judgmental throughout. [She] celebrates the tenacity and courage of Hall's battles against a corrupt, patriarchal legal system, but she also mocks the self-dramatization of Hall's responses to the imaginary as well as real trials and tribulations in her life."

Gay Wachman. *Women's Review of Books* 16.10 (July 1999): 38–39.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Hemingway, Ernest**

*Hemingway: The Final Year.* Michael Reynolds. New York: Norton, 1999. 416 pp. $30.00.

"Michael Reynolds's excellent and exhaustive biography [is] now completed with this final volume. . . ."

James Wood. *NYTBR,* July 11, 1999: 15.

**Himmler, Heinrich**

*Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42.* Ed. Peter Witte, Michael Wilt, Martina Voigt. Hamburg: Christians, 1999. 784 pp.

Found in the Russian archives a few years ago, this Dienstkalender constitutes a cardinal document, offering innumerable clues that any future historical narrative will have to take into account and interpret.

Florent Brayard. *Le Monde des Livres,* Sept. 3, 1999: 2.

**Holtby, Winifred**

*The Clear Stream: A Life of Winifred Holtby.* London: Virago, 1999. 325 pp. £18.99.

A "scrupulously evenhanded biography" of the English social reformer. "By placing Holtby in the context of her relationships and career, Shaw aims to present a more 'robust, humorous, independent, active . . . Winifred.'"

Pamela Norris. *TLS,* Sept. 3, 1999: 28.

**Hurst, Fannie**

*Fannie: The Talent for Success of Writer Fannie Hurst.* Brooke Kroeger. New York: Times Books/Random House, 1999. 400 pp. $27.50.

"One of the virtues of this book is that it highlights Hurst's feminism . . . and places Hurst's ideas in the larger context of women's issues. . . . Hurst's complexity and her own conflicted feminism might have made her ripe for the kind of scholarly attention that has reevaluated the careers of other neglected writers, and Kroeger's important book should now inaugurate that effort."

Carla Kaplan. *LATBR,* Aug. 8, 1999: 8–9.

". . . Brooke Kroeger's 'Fannie' is a fast-paced account of Hurst's life as a celebrity author, though it aspires to be a high-minded biography. Kroeger, who teaches journalism at New York University, contends that Hurst was 'deadly serious' about her art despite her remarkable commercial success. But because Kroeger offers only rudimentary criticism of Hurst's work, she never persuasively demonstrates why it deserves our attention. Instead, Kroeger likens Hurst to a factory."

Catherine Saint Louis. *NYTBR,* Sept. 19, 1999: 20.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Jarrell, Randall**

*Remembering Randall: A Memoir of Poet, Critic, and Teacher* Randall Jarrell. Mary von Schrader Jarrell. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 173 pp. $22.00.

"Mary Jarrell's 'Remembering Randall' is informal, a series of free-floating memories and impressions of their marriage, which covered the last 15 years of Jarrell's life: his long fallow period, when he was afraid his poetic gift had dried up altogether; his successful parallel career as an author of children's books; the couple's happy two year stint in Washington when he acted as poetry consultant (now poet laureate) at the Library of Congress; the productive but emotionally turbulent time during which he wrote his last book of poetry, 'The Lost World'; the severe depression that blighted his last year; and his death, which may not have been a suicide."

Brooke Allen. *NYTBR*, Aug. 1, 1999: 4

**Jaulin, Robert**

*Exercices d'Ethnologie.* Robert Jaulin. Posthumous work prepared, revised and presented by Roger Renaud. Paris: PUF, 1999. 298 pp. F218.

Ethnologist of the anti-ethnology variety, a rebel against power and the over-confident assertions of a discipline he considered a way of life and an initiation, Jaulin wrote difficult books all based on personal experience with the Saras (Chad), the Indians (California), and the Bair (Columbia) and exalting the vitality of those cultures. He passionately refused to reflect the world in the mirror of the Western World. Intransigent, provocative he somehow fascinated his students at Paris 7 University.

Nicole Lapierre. *Le Monde des Livres*, June 11, 1999: 7

**John Paul II**

*Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II.* George Weigel. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 992 pp. Can$52.50.

"*Witness to Hope* is Weigel's attempt to portray the truth of John Paul's life 'from inside' the Pope's reading of the dynamics of history and analysis of European civilisation's crisis in the 20th century. . . . [T]his is a book for those who want to think about John Paul's self-awareness and spirituality rather than vicariously experience his life. . . . Weigel has paid much closer attention to John Paul's writings than other biographers, and is anything but simple-minded, but his own evangelical earnestness does seem to miss an irony that Karol Wojtyla has recognized: History teaches us that we must accept a variety of histories."

T. F. Rigelhof. *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 16, 1999: D2

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Johnson, Lady Bird (Claudia Alta Taylor)**

*Lady Bird: A Biography of Mrs. Johnson.* Jan Jarboe Russell. New York: Scribner, 1999. 350 pp. $26.00.

"[Lady Bird Johnson] is an admirable and substantial figure in her own right, and she has been accorded a biography—thorough, respectful and at times painfully candid—that can only heighten the esteem she has long enjoyed."

Jonathan Yardley. *WP,* Aug. 30, 1999: 32.

**Jones, Mary Amanda Dixon**

*Conduct Unbecoming a Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn-of-the-Century Brooklyn.* Regina Morantz-Sanchez. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 292 pp. $30.00.

"Regina Morantz-Sanchez has plumbed this story deeply to elaborate its meanings both for the history of medicine and the history of women. She understands how trials that spark major public interest often reveal fault lines in the social order. In this case, gynecology itself was on trial, and long portions of 'Conduct Unbecoming a Woman' give rich background on the controversy over pelvic surgery that divided the experts of the era. Morantz-Sanchez, who teaches history at the University of Michigan, develops a nuanced and complex view of Jones to show how an intensely ambitious woman could make it in a field of radical gynecological surgery—only to founder and lose it all when faced with the contradictory demands of being both a surgeon and a woman."

Patricia Cline Cohen. *NYTBR,* Aug. 22, 1999: 29.

**Joplin, Janis**

*Scars of Sweet Paradise: The Life and Times of Janis Joplin.* Alice Echols. New York: Metropolitan, 1999. 408 pp. $26.00.

"[This biography] captures brilliantly the contradictions not only of the charismatic musician who here commands center stage but also of the entire cohort to which Joplin, Echols and I belonged."

Susan McClary. *Women's Review of Books* 16.12 (Sept. 1999): 1–2.

**Jordan, Michael**

*Playing for Keeps: Michael Jordan and the World He Made.* David Halberstam. New York: Random House, 1999. 426 pp. $24.95.

"While the book is portrayed as a study of the evolution of class, race and society through the prism of Michael Jordan, it is at its best when detailing every nook and cranny in the remote, gated world of this globally influential figure who wore tennis shoes to work."

Bill Plaschke. *LATBR,* Aug. 1, 1999: 4.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Kubrick, Stanley**

*Stanley Kubrick: A Biography.* Vincent Lobrutto. New York: Donald Fine, 1997. 557 pp. $29.95.

"Lobrutto's work isn't limited to the multi-faceted symbolism of Kubrick's oeuvre, but also includes the director's highly regimented and mostly unknown personal life, although his treatment of Kubrick's early life and pre-filmmaking career is perhaps the least satisfactory section of the book."

Scott Bradley. *Film Quarterly* 52.2 (Winter 1999): 62.

**Lawrence, T. E.**

*Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia.* Michael Asher. London: Viking, 1999. 419 pp. £20.00.

"Asher has the technical and literary skills to do Lawrence justice. What he lacks in original, untouched source materials, he compensates for with sound analysis, good detective work, and a first-hand soldier's description of the terrain on which he fought.

Pamela Norris. *TLS,* Sept. 3, 1999: 28.

**Leduc, Violette**

*Violette Leduc.* Carlo Jansiti. Paris: Grasset, 1999. 490 pp. F155.

To love passionately a writer does not necessarily predispose one to write a good biography of him or her. Yet, it is the case here: one wants to spend the summer with Violette Leduc, that illegitimate child who deliberately built up her autobiography (and therefore the image she wanted to give of herself), and became a symbol of modernity. The proof of a biography is in reading the works of its subject."

Josyane Savigneau. *Le Monde des Livres,* July 9, 1999: 3.

**Lorca, Federico Garcia**

*Lorca: A Dream of Life.* Leslie Stainton. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1999. 579 pp. $35.00.

"Leslie Stainton presents us with another lengthy volume, which is informative and well researched on the poet's life but marred by naive and inaccurate depictions of the cultural, historical, and political background. . . Stainton gives a rather brief account of the poet's execution and does not speculate on who gave the order or why it was given. . . . The rest of the life, however, is chronicled with detail and thoroughness. Ms. Stainton has done a great deal of research, she has unearthed a fair amount of new material, and she writes perceptively of the poet's relationships with his family and friends. One of the book's strengths is her commentary on the work and her skillful incorporation of this into her text."

David Gilmour. *NYRB,* Nov. 4, 1999: 42–44.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Louis XI**

*Louis XI: Le métier de roi.* Jacques Heers. Paris: Perrin, 1999. 432 pp. F149.

Heers tries to impose a positive vision of a king who for centuries enjoyed a dreadful reputation. And indeed he brings along a number of precious corrections. But he sometimes lacks the good faith whose absence he deplores in his precursors: authors who before him did propose a positive vision of Louis XI are overlooked or scantily mentioned. Besides, he is at pains in his plea to build a likable figure of his subject.

Ph.-J. C. *Le Monde des Livres,* Sept. 10, 1997: 7.

**Mandela, Nelson**

*Mandela: The Authorized Biography.* Anthony Sampson. New York: Knopf, 1999. 672 pp. $30.00, £24.99.

"The central challenge any serious biographer of Nelson Mandela confronts is to track, dissect and explain how it was that he managed to reconcile a nation so bitterly divided by the perversions of apartheid: to bring stability where the scale of the injustice, and the potential for bloodshed, was biblical. Anthony Sampson's authorized biography of one of the century's great individuals, of South Africa's indispensable man, achieves that. And he does so, at Mandela's express bidding, without stooping to hagiography. The triumph of 'Mandela' is that it successfully demythologizes the man without in any way undermining his heroic stature."

John Carlin. *NYTBR,* Sept. 19, 1999: 10.

"Sampson charts this pilgrim's progress with much telling detail, succeeding where a lesser writer would have failed." He "handles the post-prison decade well."

Randolph Vigne. *TLS,* July 9, 1999: 27.

**Matisse, Henri and Pierre**

*Matisse: Father and Son.* John Russell. New York: Abrams, 1999. 415 pp. $39.95.

"Russell lays to rest some of the old myths and rumors about Matisse—that he was indifferent to the fate of his wife and daughter during the war; that he offered Pierre no encouragement in his business. As an invalid, Matisse could do little except worry about his wife and daughter. In fact, his worry was so corrosive that it certainly contributed to the physical ailments that tormented him through the latter part of his life. . . . The hundreds of letters between Pierre and Henri were written because Pierre physically removed himself from personal contact with his father. Pierre once commented to the art critic David Sylvester, 'Great artists shouldn't have children.' As a writer with full access to these letters Russell has made good use

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

of them. But when writing about the Matisse family there are times when he is so cautious, so discreet, so anxious not to offend that he ends up leaving too much unexplained."

Richard Dorment. *NYRB,* Sept. 23, 1999: 22.

**McCain, John**

*Faith of My Fathers: A Family Memoir.* John McCain with Mark Salter. New York: Random House, 1999. 349 pp. $25.00.

*John McCain: An American Odyssey.* Robert Timberg. New York: Touchstone, 1999. 235 pp. $13.00.

"The two books must be read as campaign biographies. Six months ago, despite his popularity with the press and his frequent appearance on TV talk shows, McCain was not even listed by opinion pollsters as a potential Republican candidate. If his name appeared on a list of likely contenders, he was ranked among a handful of others—Republican Congressman John Kaisch of Ohio or the evangelical orator Alan Keyes—at the bottom. Today, thanks in part to a documentary about him that appeared on A&E's Biography, the publicity surrounding his autobiography, and his own old-fashioned retail campaigning, he is a solid if distant second to George W. Bush among the New Hampshire voters who will hold the nation's first primary next February. . . . As campaign biographies, both books are unusual, with much profanity and no policy statements at all; they are more about war and about the cruel conditions of the North Vietnamese prisons than they are about such matters as taxes and medical care. McCain's book, written with the help of a longtime aide, Mark Salter, who has mastered his boss's diction, is a triple biography of his grandfather, the World War II admiral John S. McCain; his father, the Vietnam-era admiral John S. McCain, Jr.; and himself. It stops abruptly when he is released from prison. Timberg's version is an updated excerpt from his 1995 work *The Nightingale's Song,* which told the stories of McCain and four other Annapolis graduates of his generation: Iran-Contra's Oliver North, Robert McFarlane, and Admiral John Poindexter, and former Navy Secretary James Webb. Timberg continues with McCain's career after prison and is virtually up to the minute."

Lars-Erik Nelson. *NYRB,* Oct. 21, 1999: 6–9.

**McClelland, Jack**

*Jack: A Life with Writers, the Story of Jack McClelland.* James King. Toronto: Knopf, 1999. 435 pp. Can$34.95.

"King acknowledges that, although this is not an authorised biography, he is under 'heavy obligations' to McClelland and his family for giving 'permission' to write about him. . . . As a result of this bargain, what we get is

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the archival McClelland—with only fleeting glimpses of the gallant, madcap, profane, outrageously funny, mercurially brilliant, tragically flesh-and-blood McClelland who, unfortunately, has abandoned his earlier efforts to write his memoirs. This portrait smells of the musty reading room rather than the steamy aura of nicotine, alcohol, printer's ink and bindery glue that permeated the old M&S [McClelland & Stewart] headquarters in Toronto's East York."

Roy MacSkimming. *Globe and Mail,* Sept. 25, 1999: D15.

**McNamara, Thomas John**

*Dr. McNamara, 1861–1921.* Robin Betts. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999. 414 pp. £30.00.

"Robin Betts . . . has done well to rescue a worthy and in many ways attractive figure from new oblivion. An admirable life [of this early twentieth century educator and government minister] despite the severe handicap that no private or personal records exist."

John Grigg. *TLS,* Sept. 3, 1999: 29.

**The Melton Family and Gina Pelligrino**

*Solomon's Sword: Two Families and the Children the State Took Away.* Michael Shapiro. New York: Times Books/Random House, 1999. 331 pp. $25.00.

"[Shapiro's] book, as its title suggests, examines what happens when the courts intervene to take children away from their parents, not the social crises leading up to such a severe incursion into family life. As he explains in his introduction, he tells the Meltons' story because 'they are people who succeeded in making the child welfare system look impotent and confused . . . parents who love their children and whose children love them but who cannot keep those children fed, clothed, schooled and safe.' And as one of the two studies driving the narrative—the other takes place in Connecticut, where a judge removed a 4-month-old girl from the home of hard-working adoptive parents and returned her to her biological mother, a 19-year-old named Gina Pelligrino who had abandoned the child in the hospital at birth and was living in a homeless shelter—the Meltons' story more than makes Shapiro's case."

Barry Werth. *NYTBR,* Aug. 29, 1999: 33.

**Menadue, John**

*Things You Learn Along the Way.* John Menadue. Sydney: David Lovell, 1999. 298 pp. Aus$26.95.

The "early pages seem to me so rich in detail and disciplined in their writing that they deserve a place in an anthology of autobiographies. In

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Australian history, Methodism has been more important than Marxism; these pages give clues why this is so. . . . At the age of 25, 'careful rather than brash, but very ambitious and with a vague sense of public service', he scored a job as a private secretary to an up-and-coming politician, E. G. Whitlam. That changed everything. . . . Above all, this is an honest book—there are no excuses and no cover-ups, especially when he writes about himself. . . . Caught up in big institutions, impelled by ambition and with both eyes on the job, he came close to forgetting who he was. Yet this is not one of those sickening breast-beating 'justified' sinner's tales. There is a manliness to Menadue's honesty with himself that makes this a noble book."

Edmund Campion. *The Weekend Australian,* Nov. 13–14, 1999: 13.

**Miller, Henry**

*Inventing Paradise: The Greek Journey, 1937–47.* Edmund Keeley. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 288 pp. $24.00.

"While on his sybaritic journey through Greece in the dark days of 1939, Henry Miller became 'more concerned about the interruption of my blissful vacation than about the dangers of the impending war.' As Edmund Keeley reminds us in his pleasing and informative account of that trip, Miller later memorialized the paradisical vistas of Attica and the friends he found there in his typically extravagant travel book 'Colossus of Maroussi' (1941)."

David Yezzi. *NYTBR,* Aug. 29, 1999: 20.

**Mitchell, William O.**

*The Life of W. O. Mitchell, Beginnings to* Who Has Seen the Wind, *1914–1947.* Barbara and Ormond Mitchell. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999. 411 pp. Can$37.50.

"The impulse that drove this massive biography of W. O. Mitchell by his son and daughter-in-law may have been love, but the method is impressively scholarly. There are no less than 45 pages of acknowledgements, footnotes, and index for part one of this giant undertaking. . . . Future biographers might want to look more critically at Mitchell's work and look longer and harder at the literary relations in his life. . . . But I predict a good life for this biography. If you read enough of those unforgiving memoirs by children of dysfunctional families, you might yearn for a literary life filled with love."

David Carpenter. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 23, 1999: D22–23.

**Moi, Daniel Arap**

*Moi: The Making of an African Statesman.* Andrew Morton. London: Michael O'Mara, 1999. 216 pp. £20.00.

"Yet the fact that Morton's book is an apology for a dictator should not be

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


allowed to obscure the new evidence it provides on Moi's life and thought. . . . Morton may offer useful biographical details, but as an explanation of contemporary Kenyan reality, his book is woefully inadequate."

Michael Chege. *TLS,* Aug. 27, 1999: 7.

**Monfried, Henry de**

*Lettres d'Abyssinie. Ecrits d'aventurier.* Tome I. Henry de Monfreid. Paris: Flammarion, 1999. 236 pp. F120.

This first volume covers a period (1911–1913) when the legendary adventurer had not written a single line of his some seventy books. His letters (mainly to his father) are plainspoken, not devoid of humor, and with a sense of the comical. They give a foretaste of his works, but they are more candid.

Bertrand Le Gendre. *Le Monde des Livres,* July 16, 1999: 7.

**Moon, Keith**

*Moon: The Life and Death of a Rock Legend.* Tony Fletcher. New York: Spike/Avon, 1999. 608 pp. $30.00.

"In 'Moon,' Tony Fletcher recounts nearly 600 pages of anecdotes, some hilarious, some deeply sad and disturbing. Unfortunately, he does not get into the nub of the issue: what was the engine driving Moon's madness?"

Tom Graves. *NYTBR,* July 25, 1999: 17.

**Moreau, Gustave**

*Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream.* Gustave Moreau, Genevieve Lacambre et al. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999. 320 pp. $60.00.

"'Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream,' with more than 200 color reproductions, essays by several Moreau scholars, and Lacambre's historical and critical text about the artist's major works, examines Moreau's amazingly varied influences, which include da Vinci's 'Adoration of the Magi,' Algerian dance costumes, Mogul miniatures, medieval tapestries and the seven labors of Hercules. The many excerpts from Moreau's own writings give the reader the clearest idea of what he aspired to: 'the flashes of illumination that one doesn't know how to situate, that have something divine in their seeming insignificance.'"

Suzanne MacNeil. *NYTBR,* July 25, 1999: 17.

**Nadaud, Martin**

*The Journey of Martin Nadaud.* Gillian Tindall. London: Chatto and Windus, 1999. 299 pp. £15.99.

"Tindall sketches Nadaud's biography with empathy and warmth, depicts

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the life of . . . peasants in the countryside and workers in the capital. . . . Tindall . . . paints him with his griefs, losses, loneliness, triumphs [and] has given the old fighter a worthy memorial."

Eugen Weber. *TLS*, Sept. 3, 1999: 27.

**Nixon, Richard**

*The Contender, Richard Nixon: The Congress Years, 1946–1952.* Irwin F. Gellman. New York: Free Press, 1999. 590 pp. $30.00.

"But this year's big Nixon book is 'The Contender,' the first installment of a projected three-volume biography by Irwin F. Gellman. An impressive feat of archival scholarship covering Nixon's years in the House and Senate, 'The Contender' shows decided sympathy for its ever controversial subject. Nixon would certainly feel fairly treated."

David Greenberg. *NYTBR*, Aug. 15, 1999: 12.

**O'Connor, Frank**

*Frank O'Connor: A Life.* Jim McKeon. North Pomfret, VT: Mainstream/Trafalgar Square, 1999. 192 pp. $35.00.

"Jim McKeon's biography of the Irish writer Frank O'Connor (1903–66) is almost as readable as any fiction told by his subject."

Joelle Zois. *NYTBR*, July 11, 1999: 23.

**Osler, William**

*William Osler: A Life in Medicine.* Michael Bliss. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 581 pp. Can$50.00.

"*Osler* is the story of a remarkable physician who harnessed and led the extraordinary changes in medicine occurring at the turn of this century . . . [and] the moving story of an unusual man who lived during turbulent times and who, through force of character, incisive intellect, courage and will, had a profound and enduring effect on doctors, their patients and the society in which they live."

Russell T. Joffe. *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 2, 1999: D14.

**Paulhan, Jean**

*Correspondance 1926–1934.* Catherine Pozzi and Jean Paulhan. Edition established, introduced, and annotated by Françoise Simonet-Tenant. Paris: Ed. Claire Paulhan, "Pour Mémoire," 1999. 216 pp. F150.

*Correspondance 1928–1962.* Jacques Chardonne and Jean Paulhan. Ed. presented and annotated by Caroline Hoctan. Paris: Stock, 1999. 250 pp. F130.

In these two correspondences, or rather "chassés-croisés" with the director

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


of the Nouvelle Revue Française, we have on one hand a writer who wants to be dubbed by the illustrious review; on the other hand, a diarist and poet more ambiguous in her desire to be recognized.

Michel Cournot. *Le Monde des Livres,* July 9, 1999: 3.

**Pelligrino, Gina.** See **Melton Family.**

**Phuc, Kim**

*The Girl in the Picture.* Denise Chong. New York: Viking, 1999. 373 pp. Can$35.00.

"Kim Phuc was 9 when a U.S.-sponsored air attack on her village of Trang Bang, about 30 minutes north of Saigon, engulfed her in flames. . . . Kim, now 36, came to Canada as a political refugee in 1991. Chong, using plain and unemotional language, has written a page-turner full of incredible plot twists, villains and real-life saints. The drama is understated, making the horror of what Kim has endured all the more startling."

Deirdre Kelly. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 23, 1999: D18.

**Pinault, François**

*François Pinault, milliardaire: Les secrets d'une incroyable fortune.* Pierre-Angel Gay and Caroline Monnot. Paris: Baland, 1999. 240 pp. F115.

This portrait of a tycoon, akin to some American robber barons, is also a picture of the French capitalism of today. For the authors, Pinault is not an innovator or a creator; nor even a restructurer or a manager, he is just a predator who enjoyed scandalous privileges from political power. It is perhaps a bit unjust: a) predators are necessary to the equilibrium of the capitalistic ecosystem; and b) he built a prominent group in mass marketing.

Elie Cohen. *Le Monde des Livres,* June 11, 1999: 6.

**Pius XII**

*Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII.* John Cornwell. New York: Viking, 1999. 430 pp. Can$42.00.

"[I]t is impossible to read the account of how well informed the Vatican was about the Holocaust, and the deportation of the Jews from Rome itself, and the prevarication and silence that came from Pius XII, without a profound sense that in few times in human history was a voice of conscience required that simply was not heard. No doubt there will be many learned texts about other strategies and other broader interests, just as rightly there will be comments about other key world leaders who also knew and neither spoke nor acted. But that is no excuse, and this is the moral question at the heart of Cornwell's book."

Bob Rae. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 16, 1999: D21.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Potter, Dennis**

*Dennis Potter: A Biography.* Humphrey Carpenter. New York: St. Martin's, 1998. 672 pp. $40.00.

". . . even those familiar with Potter's career might be astonished by Humphrey Carpenter's disturbing, engrossing, fair-minded biography. As it turns out, Potter's life was even more singular and harrowing than [Phillip] Marlowe's."

Caryn James. *NYTBR,* July 4, 1999: 5

AND *Dennis Potter: A Life on the Screen.* John R. Cook. 2nd ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998. 378 pp. £15.99.

"Carpenter carefully attempts to authenticate biographical details through cross-references, citing all his sources and providing a distressingly detailed index for the less industrious student. . . . Cook's approach to Potter is appropriately exhaustive: he takes into account Potter's novels, and his television and film adaptations, and outlines the changes in production circumstances from *Play for Today* to independent film production in the 1980s."

Philip Simpson. *Screen* 40.2 (1999): 223–2

**Pozzi, Catherine.** See **Paulhan, Jean.**

**Primus, Rebecca, and Addie Brown**

*Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Rebecca Primus of Royal Oak, Maryland, and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut, 1854–1868.* Ed. Farah Jasmine Griffin. New York: Knopf, 1999. 320 pp. $26.00.

"The love and friendship of two 19th-century black women is the basis for a fascinating collection of letters compiled by Farah Jasmine Griffin in 'Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends."

Andrea Higbie. *NYTBR,* Aug. 29, 1999: 20

**Rand, Paul**

*Paul Rand.* Steven Heller. New York: Phaidon, 1999. 255 pp. $69.95.

"Heller's emphasis is wholly on the professional, with Rand's private life sketched in. Even the crises of his career—the abrupt break with the William H. Weintraub advertising agency, the uncomfortable parting from I.B.M.—are treated without unnecessary detail. Heller does, tactfully, indicate enough of Rand's personality to show why some found him exasperating while others recall awe and inspiration. The focus remains on the accumulated work."

Bernard Sharratt. *NYTBR,* Aug. 4, 1999: 8

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Raubal, Geli**

*Hitler's Niece.* Ron Hansen. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 310 pp. Can$36.50.

"Geli Raubal, the daughter of Hitler's half-sister Angela, was just 23 when she was found dead from a gunshot wound in 1931. . . . It was said that either out of jealousy or political expedience, he murdered her or had her killed. . . . The question that confronts those who would rob famous graves is how close they should let their story get to the exhumed giant. Hitler is too big and complex for *Hitler's Niece.*"

Val Ross. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 16, 1999: D2–3.

**Raye, Martha**

*Take It from the Big Mouth: The Life of Martha Raye.* Jean Maddern Padrone. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1999. 238 pp. $25.00.

"Jean Maddern Padrone's biography of the entertainer Martha Raye reads like a Jacqueline Susann novel. Complete with pills, booze, blackouts and brawls."

Eric P. Nash. *NYTBR,* Aug. 8, 1999: 16.

**Reagan, Ronald**

*Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan.* Edmund Morris. New York: Random House, 1999. 874 pp. $35.00.

". . . as history or as biography, *Dutch* is above all ludicrous. Everything you've heard is true, and worse. It's not only the merging of real characters with invented ones—including the now-infamous 'older' Morris who supposedly knew Reagan as a young man—but also the raw emotion of the author (whoever he is), his intrusive narcissism, and the plain silliness of his dramatizations. . . . *Dutch*'s other narrative techniques, dropped more or less randomly into the text, include quotations from fabricated letters, telegrams, and diary entries, facsimiles of real letters, invented debate, authorial memoir, fabricated reminiscences of non-existent people backed up by fabricated footnotes, and much, much more. . . . The book, in short, employs a messy agglomeration of techniques to create a fictionalized memoir pretending to be an imaginatively constructed biography."

Warren Goldstein, *Chronicle of Higher Education,* Oct. 15, 1999: A80.

"Fiction relies on the suspension of disbelief. What 'Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan' induces in the reader is a suspension of belief. The accumulation of fake scenes, fake letters, and fake documents, all scrupulously documented by fake footnotes, eventually takes its toll, and one begins to wonder about the 'true' passages as well. . . . Curiously, Morris has in fact succeeded where he claims to have failed. Despite his protestations of bafflement, he has shed new light—harsh, bright light—on Reagan's character.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

[But Morris] is not interested in politics, which is the medium through which character makes its impact upon events. . . . Reagan may or may not be an empty vessel, but, in Morris's rendering, he is surrounded by emptiness, drifting weightlessly in a vacuum. Morris has told us more than we knew before about 'Reagan's own humanity' and about 'the quality of his personality.' But it is fair to ask the question: So what?"

Hendrik Hertzberg. *The New Yorker,* Oct. 11, 1999: 94–102.

"Five pages into *Dutch* and already careening helplessly into its famous peculiarity, the fancy that biographer and biographee share a minutely detailed history, bit players in each other's lives. 'Bess,' a.k.a. 'the Kentish Skylark,' is the biographer's imaginary mother, a student of lieder in Dresden and bel canto in Milan before her marriage to the equally imaginary 'Father,' who spends the considerable income from the imaginary family firm on philanthropy and the Republican Party. . . . Morris has frequently said that he never fictionalized anything Reagan actually said. There is no reason to believe that Morris did, since what Reagan says in *Dutch* so exactly reflects what we already knew of him, but neither did Morris even begin to illuminate the enduring enigma of the administration's failure and success."

Joan Didion. *NYRB,* Nov. 4, 1999: 4.

**Reich, Wilhelm**

*American Odyssey: Letters and Journals, 1940–1947.* Wilhelm Reich. Ed. Mary Boyd Higgins. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 453 pp. $27.00.

"'American Odyssey' is both boring and sad, sometimes simultaneously. The boredom comes chiefly from Reich's style—repetitive, jargonistic, whiny, pedantic, hortatory and apocalyptic by turns—but it comes too from his work and ideas in letters and journal entries containing superficially detailed accounts, complete and quirky diagrams of his lab work and 'experiments.' . . . The melancholy mostly springs from his continual self-delusions, his anguished solipsism. . . . (I should note that 'American Odyssey' is atrociously edited, by Mary Boyd Higgins, Reich's longtime patron and apologist, who in footnotes meant to elucidate unfamiliar terms like 'bions' and 'orgone' treats them as accepted scientific facts instead of the groundless suppositions they of course were.)"

Richard Gilman. *NYTBR,* Sept. 5, 1999: 13–14.

**Ripley, Sarah Alden Bradford**

*The Remarkable Mrs. Ripley: The Life of Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley.* Joan W. Goodwin. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1999. 238 pp. $35.00.

"While in many ways sympathetic with the Transcendentalist movement

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Ripley was nevertheless more of a religious skeptic than most of her friends, remaining until her death, as Goodwin illustrates with ample detail, an unusually independent thinker."

Paula Friedman. *NYTBR,* July 4, 1999: 14.

**Romanov, Olga**

*Olga Romanov, Russia's Last Grand Duchess.* Patricia Phenix. New York: Viking, 1999. 320 pp. Can$35.00.

"[Phenix's] greatest skill is in blending her source material with her own writing. This she does virtually seamlessly. There are occasional overworryings of this blend, when words such as 'fisticuffs' are stiltedly used. That said, this book is a treasure trove of information and a vivid look at lives we could not possibly otherwise know. One could review this material based only on political beliefs. . . . That would be to miss the point. Olga Romanov shows us an entire world, and regardless of one's individual view of that world, there is enrichment in knowing what it was for those who lived within it."

Gale Zoe Garnett. *Globe and Mail,* Sept. 18, 1999: D19.

**Roosevelt, Eleanor**

*Eleanor Roosevelt.* Vol. 2: *1933–1938.* Blanche Wiesen Cook. New York: Viking, 1999. 686 pp. $34.95, Can$48.95.

"Cook's second volume isn't as compelling as her first, probably inevitably. Volume 1, which was excellent, dealt with 48 years of ER's life; this one covers six, and the crucial period of formation is past. What Cook does provide is a fascinating glimpse into U.S. society at a time of tremendous upheaval."

Kathleen Byrne. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 2, 1999: D14.

"It is not going too far to say that Eleanor Roosevelt was worshipped in her time (when not being reviled). . . . Her memory has been layered with so much myth and misinterpretation that any attempt to discover the real woman is a daunting task." This second of four projected volumes is "a tale of endurance and psychic redemption, as she rose, Cinderella-like, from bleak orphanhood to stand in marriage at the side of one of the most charismatic men in American political life." Cook's ongoing biography is "a valuable addition to the literature of the New Deal."

T. H. Watkins. *Guardian Weekly,* July 29–Aug. 4: 30.

"In Volume 2 of her biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, covering the years 1933–1938, Blanche Wiessen Cook continues her diligent pentimento, getting at the tender, sprightly creature behind the starch, strident image, chronicling how the timid housewife and mother of five shed her chrysalis

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and turned into the New Deal's relentless 'Eleanor Everywhere.'"
Maureen Dowd. *NYTBR*, July 4, 1999: 11–12.

**Sade, Donatien-Alphonse François, Comte de, dit le Marquis de**

*At Home with the Marquis de Sade: A Life.* Francine du Plessix Gray. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998. 491 pp. $27.50.

*Sade: A Biographical Essay.* Laurence L. Bongie. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998. 336 pp. $29.00.

"Sade's life has, in fact, already been told very completely and very well, most recently in the brilliant biography by Maurice Lever (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993). Reading Gray in parallel with Lever, I found that she had cut and diluted but added little of substance, producing a kind of Sade lite. . . . [Emphasizing the importance of some recently uncovered letters by Sade's mother] Bongie focuses on Sade's early years and contests some of the received wisdom on Sade's relations with his parents."
Gillian Gill. *Women's Review of Books* 16.9 (June 1999): 17–18.

**Sassoon, Siegfried**

*Siegfried Sassoon, 1880–1967.* John Stuart Roberts. London: Cohen, 1999. 320 pp. £20.00.

" . . . admirably thorough, and very capably written biography of the First World War poet Siegfried Sassoon. . . . This is an immensely readable biography, which is made even more moving by having a truly tragic subject."
Ellizabeth Lowry. *TLS*, Aug. 20, 1999: 4.

**Secchiaroli, Tazio**

*Tazio Secchiaroli: Greatest of the Paparazzi.* Ed. Diego Mormorio. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999. 264 pp. $49.50.

"This delicious picture book was edited by Diego Mormorio, a photography critic, in collaboration with the family of Secchiaroli, who died last year at the age of 73. His paparazzi shots have their own artless beauty—the anti-esthetic so popular now in fashion magazines."
Penelope Green. *NYTBR*, July 18, 1999: 18.

**Spinoza, Baruch**

*Spinoza: A Life.* Steven Nadler. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. 407 pp. $34.95.

"Spinoza's life was relatively uneventful and its documentation hard to come by, so he has received little attention from biographers. Apart from the work of Gullen-Whur, who mainly sought to demonstrate that his philosophical attitudes were the product of a frustrated romance (which

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

most experts believe never happened anyway), there seems to have been no biography of him in English since 1880. Steven Nadler, a professor of philosophy and a faculty member of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has now admirably filled the gap with his meticulous, measured and highly readable 'Spinoza: A Life.'"

Anthony Gottlieb. *NYTBR,* July 18, 1999: 20.

**Stark, Freya**

*Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark.* Joan Fletcher Geniesse. Toronto: Random House, 1999. 402 pp. Can$41.95.

"Geniesse . . . does not downplay Stark's faults and blind spots, in spite of the obvious affection she has for her subject. The access Geniesse had to Stark's many friends and associates, including Jock Murray, is impressive. She was also granted permission to quote widely—especially from Stark's vividly descriptive letters, which served as journals and the basis of her books. They also reveal the personal side of this complex woman, a woman who frequently doubted herself and yearned for romance and love which remained elusive."

Kate George. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 30, 1999: D11.

**Strauss, Richard**

*Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma.* Michael Kennedy. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. 468 pp. $34.95.

"Though similar in spirit to his earlier study, *Richard Strauss,* in the Master Musicians Series (Schirmer Books), this new work is no mere amplification. Kennedy has added fresh analyses and drawn on much unpublished material, most of it gained through unprecedented access to Strauss' diaries and letters, and to the Strauss family. Kennedy provides significant insights into the composer's personal life and complicated mindset throughout his career."

Brook Peters. *Opera News* 64.3 (Aug. 1999): 74.

**Stroheim, Erich von**

*Erich von Stroheim: Du Ghetto au Gotha.* Fanny Lignon. Paris: Harmattan, 1999. 400 pp. F210.

Stroheim's entire life was an exercise in creative deception, from his suggested aristocratic origins and descent from Austrian nobility, to his career in the dragoons. In fact, he was born of wealthy Jewish parents in the clothing trade, but at the age of 24 he left for the USA and Hollywood, determined to carve out a new persona. . . . Why this obstinate determination to disown his origins? The philosopher Fanny Lignon risks a bold but fruitful hypothesis: *Sex and Character,* the anti-Semitic, misogynous book by Otto

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Weininger (d. 1903) ("the Jew must free himself from his judaicity, conquer judaism in him"), left an indelible mark on Stroheim, who followed the instruction literally.

Roland Jaccard. *Le Monde des Livres,* June 18, 1999: 1.

**Swango, Michael**

*Blind Eye: How the Medical Establishment Let a Doctor Get Away with Murder.* James B. Stewart. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. 334 pp. $25.00.

"'Blind Eye' is wonderfully done—as if the best of Ida Tarbell had been crossed with the early Joyce Carol Oates. The book is partly an indignant muckraking tract—an indictment of the doctors and medical authorities who failed to protect the public from Swango over a period of some 15 years. It is also an elaborate journalistic reconstruction that has the fascination of an acutely observed and troubling novel. The interpenetration of normality (medical authorities corruptly concerned to limit the damages and get Swango out of the hospital with minimum publicity) and psychosis (a doctor performing monstrous inversions of the Hippocratic oath, lying ingeniously, charming and dodging his way through the system) gives Stewart's story its dramatic force."

Lance Morrow. *NYTBR,* Aug. 29, 1999: 9.

**Tomkiewicz, Stanislas**

*L'adolescence volée.* Stanislas Tomkiewicz. With the collaboration of Michèle Vernant. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, "Le passé recomposé," 1999. 254 pp. F125.

It took nearly fifty years for this psychiatrist to write about the Warsaw ghetto and the camps. Fifty years to say how he made himself, and what he tried to pass on to the young people of today injured by life.

Nicole Lapierre. *Le Monde des Livres,* July 9, 1999: 9.

**Vrkljan, Irena**

*The Silk, the Shears, and Marina; Or, About Biography.* Irena Vrkljan. Trans. Sibelan Forester and Celia Hawkesworth. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999. 186 pp. $14.95.

"The first part [of this two-part work] is a typical memoir, intimate and subjective; the second is more of a literary work, an intellectual reflection on both Vrkljan's own life and that of Marina Tsvetayeva, one of Russia's greatest twentieth-century poets. . . . Vrkljan's memoir is a refreshing change, for there is nothing self-indulgent or exhibitionist here; only a deep pleasure in language, accompanied by minor chords of nostalgia and sadness."

Alison Anderson. *Women's Review of Books* 16.12 (Sept. 1999): 11–12.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Ward, John Montgomery**

*A Clever Base-Ballist: The Life and Times of John Montgomery Ward.* Bryan Di Salvatore. New York: Pantheon, 1999. 477 pp. $27.50.

"This is an annoying book (starting with its dedication in French and its pretentious epigraphs, mercifully translated, from Athenaeus, Herodotus, and Dizzy Dean). It seems both padded and thin, as if Di Salvatore, in his first book, needed to pile on words to mask a shortage of well-digested knowledge. . . . Mainly it plods along with little real sense of tension, which is quite remarkable given the time it portrays."

Burt Solomon. *NYTBR,* Sept. 19, 1999: 24.

**Yeats, William Butler**

*George's Ghosts: A New Life of W. B. Yeats.* Brenda Maddox. London: Picador, 1999. 444 pp. £20.00.

"...Maddox focuses on the poet's last twenty-two years, then inserts a retrospective chapter on the mother. . . . Women figured greatly in Yeats' life, and Maddox's narrative quickens when discussing them."

Julia O'Faolain. *TLS,* Aug. 6, 1999: 9.

**Zaidenstadt, Martin**

*The Last Survivor: In Search of Martin Zaidenstadt.* Timothy W. Rybeck. New York: Pantheon, 1999. 196 pp. $21.00.

"'The Last Survivor' is elegantly written without ever neglecting the magnitude of horror that underlies every gesture, breath and nuance in Dachau. And while Rybeck often comes across as a detached observer tossing off anecdotes about this condemned town, the book is not without its occasional bite."

Than Rosenbaum. *NYTBR,* Sept. 5, 1999: 11.

## Collections, Group Biographies, and Other Works of Interest

**Japanese Women**

*Modern Girls, Shining Stars, the Skies Of Tokyo: Five Japanese Women.* Phyllis Birnbaum. New York: Columbia UP, 1999. 240 pp. $24.95.

"In these delicate exercises in biography, Birnbaum, a novelist and translator, carefully navigates the currents that swirl around her subjects, who have been co-opted or condemned by decades of partisan commentators. Together, the five portraits are a graceful and unsettling comment on the high price of iconoclasm in modern Japan."

Janice P. Nimura. *NYTBR,* Sept. 5, 1999: 17.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Monty Python**

*Monty Python Speaks!* David Morgan. New York: Spike/Avon, 1999. 33[illegible] pp. $13.50.

*The First 28 Years of Monty Python.* Kim (Howard) Johnson. New York: S[illegible] Martin's/Griffin, 1999. 424 pp. $21.95.

"As might be expected, these two books cover much of the same ground. 'Monty Python Speaks!' is a compilation of a series of interviews with the five surviving Pythons (including the American born Terry Gilliam) and a miscellany of their associates, reflecting for the most part upon the glory years, 1969–83. David Morgan is a professional journalist as well as an aficionado, so his book is well organized, informative and discreet. . . . Kim (Howard) Johnson, on the other hand, is a longtime fan whose mixed-metaphor, dangling-participle prose style might be characterized as on-line fanzine contemporary . . . . An update of the original volume amassed for the Pythons' 20th anniversary, 'The First 28 Years of Monty Python' is a glossy great scrapbook, of a genre usually dedicated to legendary but now balding rock supergroups."

Sean Kelly. *NYTBR,* July 25, 1999: 5

**Presidents**

*A Great Wall, Six Presidents and China: An Investigative History.* Patrick Tyler. New York: Century Foundation/Public Affairs, 1999. 476 pp. $27.50.

"Tyler, a former Beijing bureau chief of The New York Times, is by training an investigative reporter, and this book is primarily the reconstructed inside story, obtained through interviews and newly declassified documents, of how every President from Richard Nixon to Bill Clinton has dealt with China. Tyler's ability to weave a narrative, his intimacy with China itself and his overall fairness toward both Republican and Democratic administrations make this book a powerful statement in defense of pragmatism. Its overarching theme is that with China the stakes are so high that every President—including Ronald Reagan, with his deep commitment to Taiwan, and Clinton with his emphasis on human rights—bowed eventually to Nixon's outline for engagement simply because there was no other choice."

Robert D. Kaplan. *NYTBR,* Sept. 19, 1999: 8

**Slaves**

*Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation.* John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 455 pp. $35.00.

"Assiduous researchers, they have catalogued and categorized in a 'Runaway Slave Database' a wealth in their book. Although scholars will probably

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


find much of this material useful, it makes 'Runaway Slaves' read more like a research report than a work of history. Detail is piled on detail and, throughout, the evidence is too thick and the interpretation too thin."

Benjamin Schwarz. *NYTBR,* Aug. 15, 1999: 30.

**White Hunters**

*White Hunters: The Golden Age of African Safaris.* Brian Herne. New York: John Macrae/Holt, 1999. 448 pp. $35.00.

"Herne is himself a veteran hunter, and each of the 50-odd chapters in 'White Hunters' relates in nail-biting detail the life history of yet another one of these dashing fellows. Together, these gripping accounts read like a colonial 'Morte d'Arthur,' each hunter seemingly braver than the next."

Lance Gould. *NYTBR,* Aug. 4, 1999: 17.

**Women Writers**

*Making Love Modern: The Intimate Public Worlds Of New York's Literary Women.* Nina Miller. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 256 pp. $45.00, cloth; $18.95, paper.

"Miller's language is laden with academic jargon, and some of her close readings of poetry are not persuasive. But ultimately she makes the idiosyncratic tensions of each subculture come alive. In particular, her discussion of the conflicted position of bourgeois black women writers sandwiched between the Renaissance's elder established and its defiant avant-garde is insightful."

Catherine Saint Louis. *NYTBR,* July 18, 1999: 18.

**Zegota**

*Zegota: Commission d'aide aux Juifs* [*Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Zydom w Warszawie 1942–1945*]. Teresa Prekerowa. Trans. Marian Apfelbaum. Paris: Ed. du Rocher, 1999. 390 pp. F137.

In recounting the story of Zegota—a network which brought assistance to the Jews in Poland—Teresa Prekerowa pays tribute to a small group of people who deserve respect and admiration, but tends to minimize the general indifference which prevailed in Poland and in Europe towards the martyrdom of the Jews. Immense was the Jewish solitude.

Nicolas Weill. *Le Monde des Livres,* July 9, 1999: 9.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# LIFELINES

**Call for Papers.** "The Cultural Work of Biography." *The Victorian Review*, an interdisciplinary journal of nineteenth-century studies, seeks submissions for a planned special number on the cultural work of biography in the nineteenth century. Papers can address the work of biography as practiced in that century, and/or the cultural work of biography on nineteenth century subjects for the present day. Please submit two hard copies or one hard copy and an MS-Word diskette of your essay (5,000 words, including notes, MLA format) to: Susan Hamilton; Editor, *Victorian Review;* Department of English; University of Alberta; Edmonton, Alberta; Canada T6G 2E5; email: susan.hamilton@ualberta.ca. **Deadline:** April 30, 2000.

**Call for Papers and Proposals.** Joint Meeting of the Popular Culture Association in the South and the American Culture Association in the South. Nashville, Tennessee. October 5–7, 2000. Send abstracts of 150 words, or completed papers, to the Program Chair, Linda Rohrer Paige. Proposals for special sessions are welcome as well. For further information, contact Linda Rohrer Paige; Department of Literature and Philosophy; P.O. Box 8023; Georgia Southern University; Statesboro, GA 30460-8023; email: lpaige@gsaix2.cc.gasou.edu; telephone: 912-681-0222. **Deadline:** Submissions must be postmarked no later than May 15, 2000.

**Call for Papers.** *SAIL Special Issue on Ella Deloria.* The Fall 00/Winter 01 issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures,* to be guest edited by Susan Gardner, Associate Professor of English, American Indian Literatures, and Film at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, will focus on Ella Deloria and other American Indian writers/cultural mediators of her generation. Of particular interest are the ways that these bridge figures redefined (positive) images of Indians through narrative and performance. For further information, or to discuss proposals, contact Susan Gardner; English Department; University of North Carolina at Charlotte; 9201 University City Boulevard; Charlotte, NC 28233-0001; email: sgardner@email.uncc.edu; telephone: 704-547-4208; fax: 704-547-3961. **Deadline for submissions:** June 1, 2000.

**Call for Papers.** "The Single Women in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation." Essays are sought for a volume to be edited by Dorothea Kehler and Laurel Amtower, and published in 2001 or 2002 by the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. The

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

category of single women may include well-born spinsters provided for by their families, entrepreneurs, wage earners (especially servants), widows, lesbians, cross-dressers who may have been lesbians, nuns, the handicapped often sheltered by the church), unwed mothers, kept women, and prostitutes. The editors welcome both literary and historical contributions; readings of medieval or Renaissance plays or works in other genres; religious, social, or art historical studies, etc. Please send queries, abstracts, or complete manuscripts (25 to 35 pages) to Laurel Amtower; Department of English and Comparative Literature; San Diego State University; San Diego, CA 92182-8140; email: lamtower@mail.sdsu.edu. **Deadline:** June 1, 2000.

**New Journal.** *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research.* *Identity* will be the official journal of the Society for Research on Identity Formation (SRIF), and will be published quarterly through Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. The launch date is January 2001. Each issue will publish theoretical, empirical, and applied articles, along with brief research reports and book reviews. For the first volume the editors are especially interested in articles that will help to define the theoretical concerns and research agendas in the field, and therefore invite for the first volume theoretical, empirical, and applied/intervention/policy review articles. Authors submitting review articles should outline and define major advances to date, current approaches, and future needs. Especially welcome are articles that document disciplinary traditions in the study of identity in a way that informs scholars from other disciplines. For further information, contact *Identity,* Department of Sociology; University of Western Ontario; London, Ontario; Canada N6A 5C2; cote@julian.uwo.ca; or visit www.sscl.uwo.ca/sociology/identity/index.htm.

**New Journal.** *Journeys: International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing.* Travel writing and other representations of journeys as cultural practice and product are engaging the attention of scholars and commentators in a wide range of disciplines. *Journeys* seeks to reflect the rich diversity of travels and journeys as social and cultural practices, as well as their significance as metaphorical processes. It will be a broadbased interdisciplinary journal of particular interest to those exploring travel writing from the perspectives of, for example, anthropology, social history, religious studies, human geography, literary criticism, and cultural studies. The first edition will be published in Spring 2000, and then for the first two years, twice a year. Manuscripts and requests for further information can be directed to The Editors, *Journeys;* Roehampton Institute London; 80 Roehampton Lane; London SW15 5SL, UK.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Norma Basch** (Review of Casper, *Constructing American Lives*) is Professor of History at the University of Rutgers, Newark, and the author, most recently, of *Framing American Divorce: From the Revolutionary Generation to the Victorians* (U of California P, 1999).

**Alana Bell** ("Biopic Bibliography") is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She is a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, and is currently conducting oral histories for a television biography of the late Honolulu jazz singer Ethel Azama.

**Jim Brogan** (Review of Robinson, *Gay Lives*), Professor of English at San Francisco State University, has taught Gay Literature there since 1972. His most recent work, a novel, *A Time to Live* (GLB, 1997), scrutinizes the erotic charges in the life of a middle-aged gay single man in contemporary San Francisco.

**Mikita Brottman** ("Everybody Loves Somebody") gained her Ph.D. from Oxford University, and is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Indiana University. She is the author, most recently, of *Hollywood Hex: Death and Destiny in the Dream Factory* (London: Creation, 1999).

**James Burns** ("Biopics and Politics") is Professor of African History at Clemson University. His research interests include colonial filmmaking, and he is currently working on a history of state-sponsored cinema in Britain's African empire.

**Nathalie Cooke** (Review of Boutilier and Prentice, *Creating Historical Memory*) is Associate Professor of English at McGill University. Her *Margaret Atwood: A Biography* was published in 1998 (ECW), and she is currently working on a book about the way life-narratives are served up in North America cookbooks.

**G. Thomas Couser** (Review of Olney, *Memory and Narrative*) is Professor of English at Hofstra University. His most recent book is *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (U of Wisconsin, 1997).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**T. Hugh Crawford** ("Glowing Dishes") is Associate Professor in the Science, Technology, and Culture Program at Georgia Tech. He is the author of *Modernism, Medicine, and William Carlos Williams* (U of Oklahoma P, 1993), and editor of the journal *Configurations.*

**George F. Custen** is Professor of Communications, Theatre and Film at the City University of New York, with appointments at The College of Staten Island and The Graduate Center for the City University, where he is Acting Professor in the Program in American Studies. He is the author of *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (Rutgers UP, 1992) and *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (Basic Books, 1997), for which he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. He is Series Editor of "The Rutgers Series in Communications, Media, and Culture, and is currently working on a new book, *So Natural That You Want to Go to War: The Struggle Over American Popular Culture.*

**Thomas Doherty** ("Malcolm X") is Associate Professor of American Studies, and Chair of the Film Studies Program at Brandeis University. He is the author of *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934* (Columbia UP, 1999).

**Lucy Fischer** *("Marlene")* is Professor of Film Studies and English at the University of Pittsburgh, where she serves as Director of the Film Studies Program. She is the author of *Jacques Tati* (G. K. Hall, 1983), *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema* (Princeton UP, 1989), *Imitation of Life* (Rutgers UP, 1991), *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre* (Princeton UP, 1996), and *Sunrise* (BFI, 1998). She is currently at work on a book entitled *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form.*

**E. Ann Kaplan** (Review of Henke, *Shattered Subjects*) is Professor of English at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Director of its Humanities Institute, which she founded in 1987. Kaplan has published widely in film and literary theory and practice from feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives. Of her twelve authored and edited volumes, several have been translated into foreign languages. Her most recent book is *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (Routledge, 1997). Her new projects *Performing Age: Bodies, Images, and Fictions* and *Trauma and Vicarious Traumatization* are currently underway.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Jacob N. Kinnard** (Review of Schober, *Sacred Biographies in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*) is Visiting Assistant Professor of Indian Religions at Northwestern University. He is the author of *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism* (Curzon, 1999), and is currently working on a book on the interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism in India.

**Audrey Levasseur** ("Film and Video Self-Biography") teaches rhetoric and composition at Indiana University. Her dissertation, "Performance in Cinematic and Video Auto/biography" (1998), provides an introduction and methodology to the new area of audiovisual auto/biographies.

**Clifford Marks** ("'Herr Direktor'") is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wyoming, where he teaches nineteenth-century British literature, critical theory, and the Holocaust.

**Glenn Man** is Professor and Chair of the Department of the English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Among his work in film is his study of American film, *Radical Visions: American Film Renaissance, 1967–1976* (Greenwood, 1994), and his most recent article, "Ideology and Genre in the *Godfather* Films," in *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy*, a Cambridge Film Handbook (2000).

**Julien S. Murphy** (Review of Chambers, *Facing It*) is Professor of Philosophy and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Southern Maine. Her recent books are *The Constructed Body: AIDS, Reproductive Technology, and Ethics* (SUNY UP, 1996), and *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Pennsylvania State UP, 1999).

**Dwight F. Reynolds** (Review of Ostle, de Moor, and Wild, *Writing the Self*) is Associate Professor of Arabic Literature in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has edited a special issue of the journal *Edebiyat: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* (7.2, 1997) on the topic of "Arabic Autobiography," and is also editor and co-author of *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (forthcoming, U of California P).

**Margaret D. Stetz** ("Oscar Wilde at the Movies"), Associate Professor of English and Women's Studies at Georgetown University, is coauthor of three exhibition catalogues on the arts of late-Victorian Britain, and the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

author of numerous essays in journals and books on nineteenth and twentieth century figures such as Aubrey Beardsley, H. G. Wells, George Gissing, E. M. Forster, E. Nesbit, Rebecca West, and Anita Brookner.

**Herbert Sussman** (Review of Broughton, *Men of Letters, Writing Lives*) is the author of *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge UP, 1995). He is currently working on the problem of the machine/body boundary in the nineteenth century.

**Robert Torry** ("'Herr Direktor'") is Associate Professor of English at the University of Wyoming, where he teaches film and American literature.

**Sue Tweg** ("Not the Full Story") is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, Monash University, Australia, and is a performer, writer, librettist, and director. One of her research interests is examining how popular film intersects with theatrical performance and social history.

**Jans B. Wager** (Review of Linville, *Feminism, Film, Fascism*) holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Davis, and is Assistant Professor of English at Utah Valley State College. She is the author of *Dangerous Dames: Women and Representation in the Weimar Street Film and Film Noir* (Ohio UP, 1999).

**Caroline Wiedmer** (Review of Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*) is the author of *Claims of Memory: Representations of the Holocaust in Contemporary France and Germany* (Cornell UP, 1999). She is currently teaching at the university of Zurich, and writing on Swiss memory politics.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# biography

To subscribe to this quarterly journal or extend your current subscription, please check the appropriate subscription category, then fill out and mail the form below.

| | USA/Canada* | All other countries |
|---|---|---|
| Institution | ❑ US$40 | ❑ US$50 |
| Individual | ❑ US$28 | ❑ US$36 |

For airmail, add US$36 per volume
*Canadian customers: add 7% GST

This is a: ❑ new subscription ❑ renewal

❑ Check/money order enclosed for US$_____.
(Must be drawn on a U.S. bank and made payable to University of Hawai'i Press.)

❑ Please charge my: ❑ Visa ❑ Mastercard

Card no. _____ Expires _____

Amount charged: US$_____

Signature _____

Name _____

Mailing address _____

_____

City/state/postal code _____

Country _____

***Send orders to:***
University of Hawai'i Press, Journals Department
2840 Kolowalu St., Honolulu, HI 96822, USA
Phone: 808-956-8833 • Fax: 808-988-6052

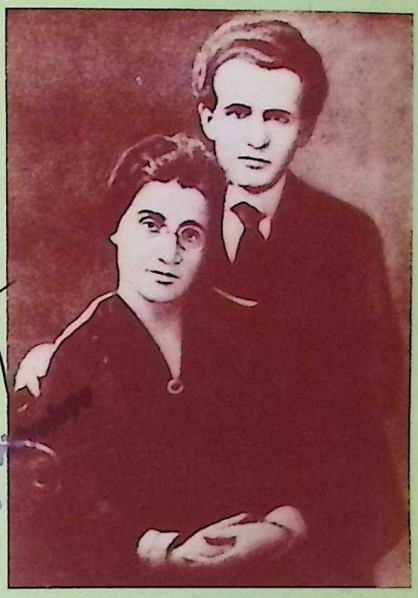
2000

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

biography

an interdisciplinary quarterly



27/3/2001

LIBRARY
Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya
HARDWAR

EVELYN HAWTHORNE

*Mary Seacole, Self-Writing, and Post-Emancipation Identity*

MICHAEL KEREN

*Biography, Historiography, and David Ben-Gurion*

S. LEIGH MATTHEWS

*Performing Michael Ondaatje's* Running in the Family

*Reviews*

*Reviewed Elsewhere*

*Lifelines*

volume 23 . number 2 . spring 2000

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

biography an interdisciplinary quarterly
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

FOUNDING EDITOR, *Biography*, and
DIRECTOR EMERITUS,
CENTER FOR BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH
George Simson

EDITOR
Craig Howes

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Stanley Schab

LITERARY EDITOR
Miriam Fuchs

REVIEWS and
REVIEWED ELSEWHERE EDITOR
Marie-José Fassiotto

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Jeanette Smith

BIBLIOGRAPHERS
Phyllis Wachter
William Todd Schultz

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I PRESS LIAISONS
Joel Bradshaw
Lori A. Kozey

*Working Editorial Committee*

AMERICAN STUDIES
Floyd Matson

ART
Lewis Andrews

CONSULTING EDITOR
Maxine Hong Kingston

EAST ASIA
Peter H. Lee

ECONOMICS
James Marsh

EDUCATION
Edward Beauchamp

GEOGRAPHY
Forrest R. Pitts

HISTORY
Jerry Bentley
G. Raymond Nunn

HISTORY OF SCIENCE
Philip Rehbock

LAW
Mari Matsuda

LITERATURE
Anthony M. Friedson
Mark Heberle

MEDICINE
Virginia Nelson

MUSIC
Allen Trubitt

PACIFIC ISLANDS
Brij V. Lal

PSYCHOLOGY
William R. Perry

PUBLIC FIGURES
Neil Abercrombie

RELIGION
Robert Bobilin

ROVING EDITOR
Marc Pachter

RUSSIAN
Virginia Bennett

SOCIAL SCIENCE
Glenn D. Paige

SOUTHEAST ASIA
Stephen O'Harrow

SPECIAL PROJECTS
Marguerite B. Simson

WOMEN'S STUDIES
Nancie Caraway

---

*Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* is published by the University of Hawai'i Press for the Biographical Research Center.

©2000 by the Biographical Research Center. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the USA.

ISSN 0162-4962

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

One year:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Individuals: | $28.00 USA/Canada | $36.00 all other countries (add $36.00 for air mail delivery |
| Institutions: | $40.00 USA/Canada | $50.00 all other countries (add $36.00 for air mail delivery |

Two years:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Individuals: | $51.00 USA/Canada | $65.00 all other countries (add $72.00 for air mail delivery |
| Institutions: | $72.00 USA/Canada | $90.00 all other countries (add $72.00 for air mail delivery |

Single issues:

Individuals or institutions: $10.00 (add $9.00 for air mail delivery outside of the U.S. or Canada)

Send subscription correspondence to:

University of Hawai'i Press, Journals Department
2840 Kolowalu Street, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822 USA
telephone: (808) 956-8833 • fax: (808) 988-6052

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection, Haridwar

Claims for issues not received will be honored for 180 days after the date of publication.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# SELF-WRITING, LITERARY TRADITIONS, AND POST-EMANCIPATION IDENTITY: THE CASE OF MARY SEACOLE

EVELYN J. HAWTHORNE

*". . . unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all."*

Written at the height of the Victorian period, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) is a paradigmatic black woman's text of self-authoring that has been lauded as "one of the most readable and rewarding black women's autobiographies in the nineteenth century" (Andrews, Introduction xxviii). Representing a locus classicus of culturally sanctioned feminine self-reliance, it was written and published in England by Mary Jane Grant Seacole (1805–1881), a free-born Jamaican who achieved fame for her work as a nurse during the Crimean War, meriting several medals.[1] Transgressing gender, race, and class roles as an adventuring businesswoman in Jamaica, London, Haiti, New Granada, and Cuba, and as a female who, undaunted by the horrors of the battlefield, deployed herself to the Crimean War, this heroine is extraordinary by any standard. But in addition to its biographical importance, this work is an invaluable means of espying how the free(d) female subject fashioned her identity, from a socially, racially, and economically disempowered position in the post-Emancipation historical environment.[2] *Wonderful Adventures* is a cultural text that reveals how Seacole, a woman of color, exploited critical historical moments to construct a new social identity. At the same time, though, Seacole's independence raises questions about the role of the dominant power in the free(d) subject's search for equality and social rights, for Seacole seems to have advanced through her own machinations, rather than through the inconsistent British script of freedom offered to the colonial, racial subject.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar
© Biographical Research Center

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

I will argue that Seacole's textual and rhetorical strategies encode contestatory practices that enable her to author herself and to critique and unsettle Victorian ideology. By manipulating genre and linguistic conventions, Seacole promotes a double-voicedness that allows her to challenge "disciplining" systems (in Foucault's sense of non-coercion)—practices which mark her as a resisting subject.[3] By foregrounding cultural issues of race and gender, thus forcing them into higher public visibility, Seacole also contends against the contradictory and conflictual text of freedom. Though seemingly ideologically compliant, then, the work's signifying strategies produce a text that contests authority while textualizing the authenticity of difference and hybrid subjectivity.

When the location of the center shifts from Jamaica to England, Seacole finds this new site of difference less predictable than the colonial one.[4] The rejection Seacole encountered when she applied to serve as a nurse under Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War suggests how confusing the faces of freedom were for the post-Emancipation subject in nineteenth-century Britain. In Jamaica, Seacole had learned medicine from British surgeons. Her work there and in Panama, especially during cholera and yellow fever epidemics, had earned her a reputation as a nurse, and the title of "yellow doctress." When she became aware of the desperate conditions at the Crimean warfront—the newspapers were full of stories about untended soldiers dying more from diseases and lack of care and sanitation than from war wounds—a self-assured Seacole traveled to England to volunteer, carrying letters of recommendation from well-ranking surgeons. But despite her training and her letters of support, both the Secretary of War and the Office of Quatermaster-General ignored her. Seacole responded by getting to the Crimea on her own. Forming a corporation with an old family friend, she financed her own expedition to set up there as a "sutler."[5] Sailing first from England to Constantinople with her warehouse of provisions, she then made her way to Balaclava. At a place near the battlefield, she spent the considerable sum of eight hundred pounds to erect her store, the "British Hotel." Since she had also outfitted herself with medicines, she soon began to render nursing services to many of the sick and wounded British troops. Especially in this capacity as nurse, Seacole won considerable fame in Britain, largely as the result of several wartime news stories by the *Times* correspondent W. H. Russell. Crimean War surgeons such as Douglas Arthur Reid would later praise her skills as well. But in her memoir she would reprove her readers about "how hard the right woman had to struggle to convey herself to the right place" (134).

Seacole's work, a rare cultural text that provides a key source of information about black, gendered self-construction in the mid-nineteenth century, has also provoked conflicting readings. Recent critics writing about

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


the black presence in England regard Seacole as a resistor of British imperialism. In *Staying Power,* for example, Peter Fryer discusses Seacole as one of the four noteworthy Black Britons to have challenged the British social status quo. Like Chartist Movement leader William Cuffay, Anglo-American classical actor Ira Aldridge, and London-born composer Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Fryer regards Mary Seacole as an early hero who refused to accept a place at the edges of English society. In *The Satanic Verses,* Salman Rushdie hails her as yet another example of a black heroic figure occluded by British hegemonic history (292). And of course, in her native Jamaica she is considered an heroic cultural symbol, a model of self-reliance and ambition. Public buildings, such as the headquarters of the Jamaica Nurses' Association, a ward at the Kingston Public Hospital, and a residence hall at the University of the West Indies, are named for her. Other critics, however, fault Seacole for her "British" self-construction—her seeming reverence for British values, and her complacence with its racial hypocrisies. In "The Enigma of Arrival," Caribbean scholar Sandra Pouchet Paquet lauds Seacole's uniqueness and abilities, but severely criticizes her individualism, her self-construction as male heroic subject, her "servility" to British imperialism, and her corresponding minimizing if not erasing of her formative Caribbean heritage.[6] Finally, William L. Andrews ends his Introduction to Seacole's work by asking if she sufficiently discerned the irony of her condition "as a black woman trying assiduously to make a respectable place for herself in the Western scheme of things" (xxxiv).

Two views of the public Seacole: Count Gleichen's bust (photo by courtesy of The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, and the National Portrait Gallery, London), and a Jamaica 50¢ stamp.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

These various critical positions suggest that Seacole's work should be re-examined for those complex interactions that Paul Gilroy notes create the "social ecology of identity and identification" for the black subject in England (22). Seacole produced her memoir in a Victorian ideological environment, with its ambiguous racial and gender discourses, and constraining literary traditions. Among the most pressing questions to ask of this text is what the (literary) restraints were for the gendered and racialized subject in the mid-century Victorian environment. What, in short, were the literary options made available to, or imposed upon, Mary Seacole? Further, what politics of voice could Seacole have employed within the structures of literary and cultural domination? And most importantly, how might some aspects of her work—and especially those most criticized—result from Seacole's struggles and successes in defining herself within such an environment saturated with racial and ideological discourses?

Most literary histories of this period would suggest that in adopting any one of three favorite genres—memoir, autobiography, or travel writing—Mary Seacole was displaying "exceptional" literary behavior. As recent scholarship on the Victorian period shows, these genres were generally androcentric and patriarchal domains, customized to express adventurous, ambitious, event-making, male personae. In *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920,* Regenia Gagnier has described the Victorian construction of gender this way:

> In Britain, middle-class boys experienced and wrote of an ordered progress from preschool at home to childhood and youth at school and university, through the Raj, diplomatic corps, or civil service. . . . Middle-class women wrote of early life with fathers and afterlife with husbands. These two patterns—as central to the great nineteenth century realist novels as to Victorian autobiographies—represent middle-class gender construction of masculinity and femininity, public power and domesticity. (44)

Those mid-century Victorian women writers who followed the female pattern eschewed the "indecency" or "egotism" that was associated with "manly" genres, writing instead diaries, journals, and (autobiographical) fiction. As for autobiography, according to Valerie Sanders, many Victorian women "were only too well aware of the dangers inherent in any serious form of self-writing" (10); Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for instance, maintained that "To be one's own chronicler is a task generally dictated by extreme vanity" (130, qtd. in Sanders 10), and in fact, many women even felt it unseemly to speak "before a sexually mixed audience, or what journalists of the period liked to call a 'promiscuous' gathering" (Warhol 159). Before

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


1920, according to Elizabeth Winston, women autobiographers were "modest, self-effacing" figures who "underestimated achievements, disclaimed interest in personal recognition, stressed the broad historical value of their life stories" (110).

Mary Seacole would transgress these patriarchal codes and restrictions; in writing of her travels, she would trespass as well. Victorian travel writing had very pronounced cultural valences at mid-century. As Mary Louise Pratt and other scholars indicate, travel writing was nationalistic and Eurocentric (see Birkett, Middleton, Mulvey, and Nerlich). Its practitioners assumed their superiority, and their representations of "others" displayed that presumption. Furthermore, those women who did write travel narratives seemed to consider it a genre of "gentility." Most of these travelers were aristocrats who routinely identified their status with titles such as "Baroness," "Lady," "Marchioness," or "Vicomtess." Other authors were predictably connected to high officials or to missionaries. Even when they maintained conventions of propriety and patriotism, women were still often censured for pursuing an androcentric genre, as Mrs. Henry (Fanny) Duberly, Seacole's fellow writer of the Crimean War, discovered when she tried to secure permission to dedicate her work, *Journal Kept During the Russian War,* to Queen Victoria.[7]

I would propose that Mary Seacole not only intuited liberating possibilities in these genres, but also that when writing *Wonderful Adventures* she appropriated and then altered them in ways that enabled her to create a self-empowering story founded on alterity and creolity. Viewed from this perspective, her text supplies numerous examples of how she manipulated literary domains of exclusivity to inscribe her "different" subjectivity.

## PART 1: NEGOTIATING GENRE

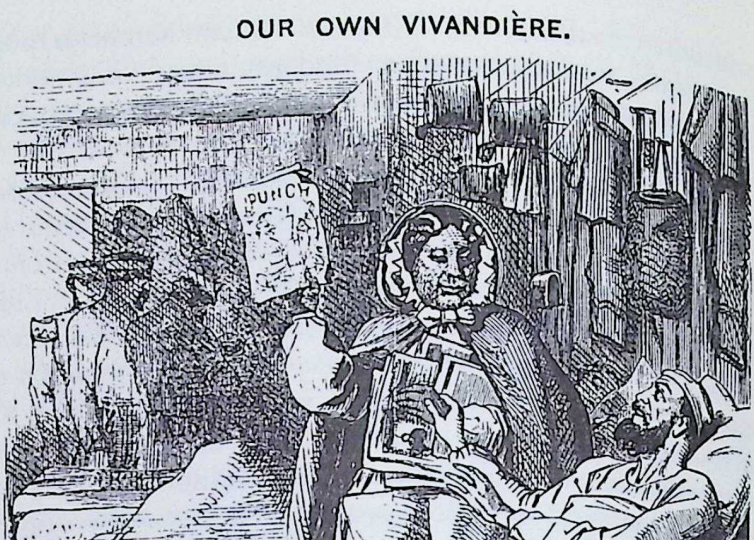
*I was born in the town of Kingston, in the island of Jamaica, some time in the present century. As a female, and a widow, I may be well excused giving the precise date of this important event. . . .*

As W. H. Russell suggested in his Preface to *Wonderful Adventures,* Seacole's narrative needs would have called for the genre of memoir:

> If singleness of heart, true charity, and Christian works; if trials and sufferings, dangers and perils, encountered boldly by a helpless woman on her errand of mercy in the camp and in the battle-field, can excite sympathy or move curiosity, Mary Seacole will have many friends and many readers.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri




"Mother Seacole"—the *Punch* version, 30 May 1857 (courtesy of the Punch Library & Archive).

The mention here of "camp" and "battle-field," with their tragic narrative connotations, leaves no doubt as to the intent of Russell's sponsorship. That the work is dedicated to Major-General Lord Rokeby, K.C.B., and concludes with acknowledgments to fourteen military men, also points to the patriotic bounds that would dictate a particular kind of life-writing.

Seacole was well aware of the British public's avid interest in literature about the Crimean War. However unpopular it might have been, by 1857 the war was the subject of a proliferation of new writing, some even by women, such as Frances Duberly's *Journal Kept During the Russian War* (1855) and Fanny Taylor's *Eastern Hospitals and Nurses* (1857). The pragmatic Seacole acknowledges the competition: "the reader must have had more than enough of journals and chronicles of Crimean life, and I am only the historian of Spring Hill" (146–47). But Seacole also knew that the public was well acquainted with "Mother Seacole" of Crimean War fame. She had been the subject not only of news stories by Russell, but of a poem, "A Stir for Seacole," which appeared in *Punch* (Dec. 6, 1856: 221), and even of an opera, "The Mother of the Regiment." In fact, a "grand military festival for the benefit of Mrs. Seacole" was held at the Royal Surrey Gardens on July 27–30, 1857.[8] "Nothing could have been more triumphantly successful," the *Times* reported.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


> Notwithstanding that the charge for admission was quintupled, there was an immense concourse in the hall, and it need scarcely be said that the audience was of a character more 'exclusive' than is customary at transpontine musical performances. . . . Mrs. Seacole sat in state in front of the centre gallery, supported by Lord Rokeby on one side, by Lord George Paget on the other. ("Festival," qtd. in Alexander and Dewjee 32)

Together these various publications and performances had ensured that, as the *Times* noted, "Few names were more familiar to the public during the late war than that of Mrs. Seacole," and especially since the war's unexpected ending had left her with an unsaleable surplus of goods and virtually bankrupt, she would have been eager to produce a marketable work, so as to recoup the losses from her Crimean adventure.

And yet, the narrative Seacole actually produces begins surprisingly with literary rituals commonly associated with slave narratives, rather than war memoirs. Take for example her familiar "I was born . . . " opening. Contemporary readers familiar with slave narratives would immediately recognize this strategy linking Seacole's work to such familiar precedents as Mary Prince's *History,* which begins, "I was born at Brackish-Pond, in Bermuda . . . ," or the even more famous *Narrative* of Frederick Douglass, which begins "I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age . . . ." In his essay "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," James Olney identifies this generic pattern as "1. a first sentence beginning, 'I was born . . . ,' then specifying a place but not a date of birth; 2. a sketchy account of parentage, often involving a white father" (153). Seacole follows this pattern by providing the requisite place of birth, indeterminate age, and deferred mention of parentage, but she also asserts her difference and her authorization by undermining the conventions as well.[9] Her echoing of this opening convention is markedly irreverent and highly parodic. Through such flippant phrases as "sometime in the present century," and her claiming that "she may be well excused giving the precise date of this important event" because she is "a female, and a widow," Seacole breaks the sober decorum of the slave genre with carnivalizing jocularity. It can be argued that post-1840s slave narratives such as Douglass's were already egoistic, even "conceited" works, which challenged narrative expectations through innovative rhetorical strategies such as "novelizing" or "performing" the self (see Andrews, "Uses"). But these narratives still proceed with a requisite decorum and solemnity. Seacole is more disruptive. Her humor accompanies her hubris, and creates a unique voice that disrupts the "master narratives" of both the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

literary and imperial authority systems. Refusing to inscribe her story in the social codings of racial humility, the resisting creole rejects the rules in ways which underline her contempt not only for slavery (existing still in the U.S., though discontinued in her native Jamaica since 1833), but also for servility. Seacole subverts familiar narrative rituals and outdated epistemological constructions, and in the process avoids authority's surveillance so as to present herself as unfettered subject. She asserts a privilege of freedom.

Why did Seacole adopt this strategy? Genre shapes what can be said, and with its heroic persona and idealized subjectivity, the androcentric form of the memoir would have constrained Seacole's self-expression. Instead, in her account of the Crimea, Seacole stretched the boundaries of the memoir to negotiate and produce the truths of her own existence. By interpellating the slave narrative genre into her account, Seacole thematizes her social biography, inscribing a space for the hybrid, Caribbean subject within the imperial, authenticating genre of the war memoir.

Seacole also exploited the authority of travel writing, with its ethnographic gaze, to enhance further her representation of a post-Emancipation black subject. In England, the subject of native "laziness" saturated commentary in journals, letters, histories, and essays, as well as travel and ethnographical writing. In his "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (1849), Thomas Carlyle was only the most famous figure of many to harangue England with this pernicious idea. Since this "laziness" theme commonly erupted in debates over the readiness of ex-slave societies to assume self-governance, or even whether slaves (in the U.S. in particular) should be free at all, Seacole's interventions come at a time of crisis. By appropriating that male, classed authority that allows travel writers to observe and comment on "mores and manners," Seacole re-presents the black subject at the same time that she demythologizes white subjects, who appear in her work as crude and barbaric occupants of the frontier spaces of Panama.

Seacole's invocation of the travel narrative perspective allows her to correct images of inferiority and underachievement codified in such types as "Quashie" and "Sambo," and to present in their place accounts of black accomplishment. When writing about Panama, Seacole as travel writer reports that

> . . . many of the negroes, fugitive from the Southern States, had sought refuge in this and the other States of Central America, where every profession was open to them; and as they were generally superior men . . . they soon rose to positions of eminence in New Granada. In the priesthood, in the army, in all municipal offices, the self-liberated negroes were invariably found in the foremost rank; and the people, for some reason—perhaps because they recognized in them superior talents for administration—always respected them. . . . (51)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Within this recognizable, moderate, objective British narrative space, Seacole deftly reverses racist imaginings. Far from being lazy or undirected, freed socially-unencumbered black men in Panama are the founders of a free state:

> What was of any worth in their institutions, such as their comparative freedom, religious toleration, etc., was owing mainly to the negroes who had sought the protection of the republic. . . . [T]he blacks are enterprising, and in their opinions incline not unnaturally to democracy. (72)

Seacole's own sense of herself powerfully informs this description. As someone who occupies a second-class position in England, a position she became familiar with when she applied to serve in the Crimea, Seacole recognizes immediately the ambiguities of British discourses of freedom and equality, and the vagaries of their application. Adopting the perspective of the traveler allows her calmly to expose the lies and prejudices at work.

## PART 2: NEGOTIATING RACE

> *I am a Creole, and have good Scotch blood coursing in my veins. My father was a soldier, of an old Scotch family; and to him I often trace my affection for a camp-life, and my sympathy with what I have heard my friends call "the pomp, pride, and circumstance of glorious war." Many people have also traced to my Scotch blood that energy and activity which are not always found in the Creole race, and what have carried me to so many varied scenes: and perhaps they are right. I have often heard the term "lazy Creole" applied to my country people; but I am sure I do not know what it is to be indolent.*

This excerpt, the second set of sentences in the opening paragraph of *Wonderful Adventures,* not only reveals the source of Seacole's interest in the military—her father—but also by foregrounding whiteness and a "mulatto" discourse, opens up for the Victorian reader a complex and contentious history. Caught in a three-tiered hierarchical system, the Caribbean mulatto occupies a problematic sociopolitical space that Douglas Hall, the well-known Jamaican historian, describes as follows:

> Between the "pure white," the paragon of intellectuality and high civilization, and the "pure black," the paragon of brute strength and barbarism, free colored people shifted uneasily, patronized by the whites and disliked by the slaves. (211)

It should not be so surprising that Seacole would produce herself in terms of hybridization. As Robert J. C. Young has remarked, racial codings were the main instrument of imperial power in its subject-constituting projects,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

and the nineteenth century obsession with hybridity—often seen as "unnatural"—profoundly affected constructions of Caribbean identity. When she speaks of herself as "Creole" with "Scotch" blood, Seacole declares a "mixed" heritage. Furthermore, by claiming to be energetic and up-and-going, she also unavoidably introduces into the text the absent, but powerful, discourse of the "lazy native." Although she does not reproduce the "bizarre imaginings and nomenclatures" of that imperial taxonomic and classificatory system responsible for such terms as *mulatto, sambo, quadroon* and *mustee* among its 120-odd designations, by invoking such coded oppositions as laziness and industry, Seacole could still be seen as falling victim to those powerful disciplining knowledge systems which make their "truths" seem natural and inevitable (see Zavala 334).

But the passage is perhaps not rhetorically simple. By declaring "I have good Scotch blood," Seacole undeniably appropriates—but as importantly mimics—the imperial idiom. Elaborating upon Foucault's description of sexuality as a "dense transfer point of power" (*History* 103), Ann Stoler notes that sexual grammars fundamental to maintaining the colonial order of things always operated to the detriment of the woman of color:

> Being a less well-to-do woman and of mixed descent coded a range of social relation as erotically driven, sensually charged, and sexually precocious by definition. (115)

Seacole's contemporaries would have agreed with this assessment. In *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Condition* (1862), Edward Bean Underhill notes that "whatever their birth," mulattos "were deemed always illegitimate" (225). Pro-Imperialist authors consistently accused women of mixed heritage with "immodesty." In *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions* (1833), for instance, Mrs. Carmichael writes that she "observed coloured women at the door and windows of houses, the dresses of some of whom would have been elegant and graceful, had they been more modest" (10–11). Raised in this racially sexualized climate, Seacole undoubtedly found it necessary to define herself against the overwhelmingly negative and plentiful, textualizations of mulatto immodesty and illegitimacy. One function of Seacole's passage could therefore be to neutralize or counter this pervasive racist discourse. By insisting on the dignity of her lineage—her use of the word "good," for example—she presents herself as a black subject defending her legitimacy and worth. Furthermore, the term "good Scotch" calls attention to the ethnic propaganda buried within the imperium—in this case, the Scotsman's reputed energy and financial sharpness. Such "insider" language thus stands revealed in all its pomposity and political ambiguity.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


When Seacole uses the word "creole" to refer to herself, she is deliberately courting linguistic confusion. In the nineteenth century this term, without the qualifier black or colored, generally referred to white, European settlers in the Caribbean, as its use by such writers as Monk Lewis, Mrs. Carmichael, and Edward Bean Underhill show. Like Henry Louis Gates's trickster in *The Signifying Monkey,* then, Seacole may be seen as trying to subvert meaning by "embodying the ambiguities of language" (52). A parallel play on meanings occurs when she ventriloquizes the voices of imperial authority by describing herself variously, as "brown," "slightly brown," and "yellow."

A similar play is apparent in the qualifying phrase "and perhaps they are right" that resounds throughout the first chapter of her *Adventures.* By attributing statements to external, hegemonic voices, Seacole not only identifies such statements as intrusive knowledges, but also identifies her potential differences with them. Such phrases as "what I have heard my friends call," "Many people have also traced," or "I have often heard the term," are therefore also interventions into scripts of authority which implicitly mark her as independent.[10] These and other passages that I have discussed actually indicate that Seacole's literary practice is more contestatory than a simply conventional reading might suggest. Through her writing Seacole found ways to comment on those European-induced anxieties of race and hybridity at the center of their powerful yet ambivalent scripts. Further, it is Seacole's Caribbeanness, developed in her native environment and buoyed up by native progressiveness, that has granted her a culturally empowered independence of mind.

But Seacole's experiences in England would have been unsettling to her native self-confidence for more confusing reasons as well. England during this period basked in a reputation of racial tolerance and fairness (see Midgley, Fryer, Gundara and Duffield)—a social presumption toward racial enlightenment that made England more ideologically opaque and therefore more disorienting. The country's period of "scientific racism," when ideology and behavior would support overt institutionalized racism, still lay in the future. And even though there had been many instances of racism, as Peter Fryer details in his chapter "The Everyday Struggle, 1787–1833," in the 1850s England was perceived as a haven for black people, who were "relatively free to denounce discrimination when they encountered it" (Lorimer 47). Black Americans, and especially visiting abolitionist celebrities, expressed unequivocally positive reactions to England. Harriet Jacobs proclaimed that during her time there she "never saw the slightest symptoms of prejudice against color" (278, qtd in Lorimer 38), and writing in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

1855, Frederick Douglass declared that he enjoyed "nearly two years of equal social privileges in England" and "never, during the whole time having met with a single word, look, or gesture which gave me the slightest reason to think my colour was an offense to anybody" (388). Historian Douglas A. Lorimer suggests that English humanitarian attitudes not only affected political and economic developments, but even encouraged British abolitionists to act as a social influence curbing overt racism, serving as "watchdogs over any evidence of discrimination" (278).

Both the constraints of the memoir form and this historical context would together have tempered expressions of outrage toward the British. But even in these circumstances, Seacole resists by puncturing the decorum with personal narratives of discrimination. Take for example the following reversion from a public voice to one that is impassioned and blunt:

> Of course, had it not been for my old strong-mindedness . . . I should have given up the scheme a score of times in as many days; so regularly did each successive day give birth to a fresh set of rebuffs and disappointments. I shall make no excuse to my readers for giving them a pretty full history of my struggles to become a Crimean *heroine!* (76)

By suggesting that her "pretty full history" would make it clear that only her own self-reliance made her a "Crimean heroine," Seacole critiques British complacency. By emphasizing her "strong-mindedness," she further counters prevailing views of black dependency. And finally, Seacole also testifies to the strength of her own response to racial hostility: "Strangely enough, some of the most vivid of my recollections are the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion's complexion" (4). Into a narrative of the Crimean War—the audience's reason for reading the work—Seacole therefore boldly interjects a subtextual history of black racial mistreatment in England.

Seacole can be equally subtle in her use of irony to puncture British "highmindedness." In the following passage she even goes so far as to suggest that the virulence of North American racism might have still recognizable British origins. "Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here," Seacole muses, "Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs?" (79). Seacole conducts this questioning of Victorian racial fairness through an intimate dialogue with her reader. And pride must also be recognized as a factor. At the time of writing the memoir, a year after the war ended, Seacole would have felt vindicated not only by her successes but by her superiority of performance when compared to the nurses who

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


had been chosen. As Fanny Taylor wrote at the end of the war, when the Crimean nurses were assembled, "From the beginning it was determined that all party feeling was to be merged in the one common bond of alleviating suffering, and in the selection of nurses few questions were asked, and no objections made on the ground of differences of creed or shades of opinion" (5–6). As events unfolded, however, reports indicate that many of these nurses performed poorly. Some were simply incompetent; others were drunkards and had to be sent back to England. Mary Seacole had stayed and succeeded within these parameters, but when writing her *Adventures,* she made it clear that while shades of creed and opinion may well have been discounted, shades of "color" still had made a difference.

## PART 3: NEGOTIATING GENDER

*All my life long I have followed the impulse which led me to be up and doing; and so far from resting idle anywhere, I have never wanted inclination to rove, nor will powerful enough to find a way to carry out my wishes.*

As Judith Lowder Newton argues, "power as ability has been defined both as achievement and competence and, by implication, as a form of self-definition or self-rule" (2). Although Seacole's paragraph demonstrates her ability to bend generic borders, the sentence above embodies another corrective discourse of her work: the argument for female empowerment based on woman's own sites of desire. Emphatic about her need to be "up and doing," Seacole maps out her own unconventionality by preferring a space other than the domestic, maternal one. "I had from early youth a yearning for medical knowledge and practice which has never deserted me," Seacole writes, and she also frequently expresses her desire for the independence and mobility afforded by travel. It need hardly be mentioned here how Seacole's professional aspirations clashed with standard nineteenth-century traditions. "What alarmed the Victorians," Leslie Parker Hume and Karen M. Offen write, "were women's working activities that were distant from the household either in time or space, that were not traditional, and that seemed somehow to threaten the family." For this reason, "However different the social backgrounds of these women, the prostitute, factory girl, doctor, and social reformer all proved troubling to nineteenth-century society, and their working activities appeared iconoclastic to many of their contemporaries" (278). At the same time, though, we should recognize that Seacole's aspirations, while anomalous to the British view, are natural to the Caribbean context. Historian Barbara Bush writes that women had brought with them from Africa "culturally-derived gender formations that were

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

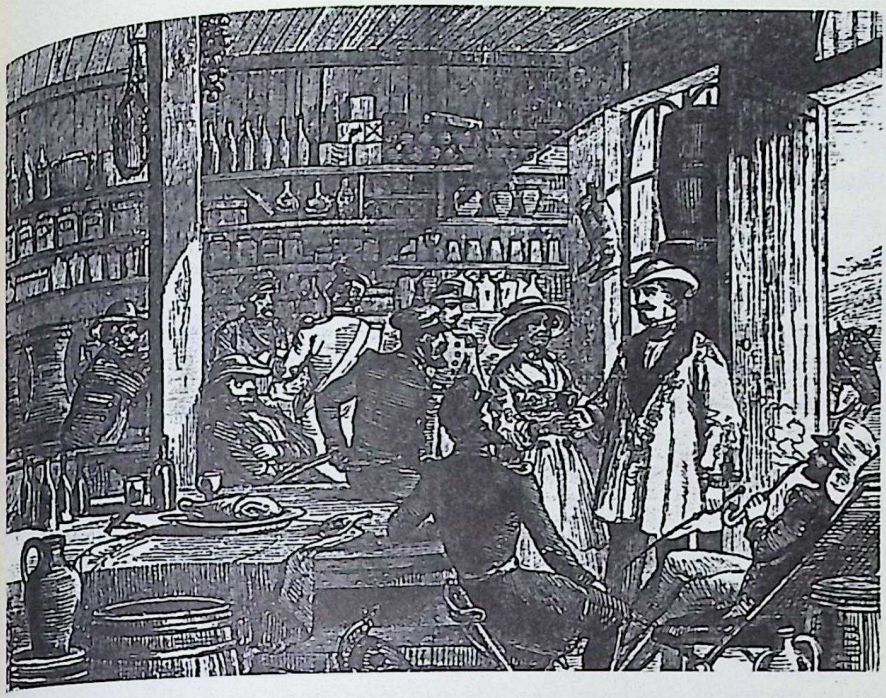
Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

creolized into their West Indian identities. In traditional African societies, for instance, women were "significant and indispensable" to food production and marketing, and they had "carried these skills with them to the Caribbean and, in addition to participating fully in the cultivation of provision grounds, they became prominent as market sellers and 'higglers' or commercial intermediaries" (48–49). The free "colored" women—to which group Seacole's family belonged—also exhibited gender norms different from the British. Gad Heuman describes multilevel entrepreneurship in which members of this group "became shopkeepers and sold provisions, millinery, confectionery, and preserves," often having "two or three slaves who traveled into the interior of the island to sell commodities on the estates" (9). As subjects of slavery and colonialism, then, West Indian women often paradoxically followed patterns of female self-empowerment far more expansive than those available to British women. Colonialism, in short, did not encourage passivity in the colonized, which not surprisingly set Seacole's Caribbean consciousness at odds with the ideals and (double) standards that prevailed regarding British women.

Seacole's unabashed opposition to hegemonic systems is part of her ongoing articulation of a different selfhood. She is an early example of those women who historically have seized on opportune moments of cultural crisis to gain personal mobility. (Other examples would be those black women who, covered by the patriotic propaganda of "Rosie the Riveter"—a white, middle-class myth—used the social ruptures of World War II to create new economic and social spaces for themselves.[11]) By employing the topoi of work and adventure, Seacole introduces into her text the possibility of new models for gender roles. Further, Seacole's account of her own mother suggests that a new, Caribbean-engendered female type had already existed for years. Instead of reproducing the popular, sentimentalized image of the mulatto subject as either the promiscuous deviant, or the desirable, abandonable woman of fictions such as Yarico and Inkle—one of the "most often repeated and most popular narratives of the eighteenth century" (Hulme 227)[12]—Seacole presents a non-sentimentalized narrative of womanly entrepreneurship. By valorizing her mother as a dignified and successful hotel owner, and as a knowledgeable "doctoress" of great importance within her community, Seacole not only undermines the stereotype of the female lodging-housekeeper as morally disreputable,[13] but also celebrates an indigenous version of womanhood which stands in sharp contrast to those enervated Victorian definitions of true womanhood such as Coventry Patmore's "angel in the house." In the process, racial stereotypes of colored women dissolve.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Seacole contra stereotypes: Alexis Soyer visiting Mary Seacole at the British Hotel (courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica).

## CONCLUSION

*I did not return to England by the most direct route, but took the opportunity of seeing more of men and manners in yet other lands. (197)*

Seacole's defiance of gender norms and racial codings is barely concealed here. There is no yearning for the safe, domestic, female space, but instead an open statement of her male-evoking desire for adventure. She will not return "by the most direct route." If aware of the British denigrative attitudes toward a woman "globe trotteress" (Hamalian), Seacole is not intimidated. As a black woman, through the language of travel writing—the desire to see more "of men and manners"—Seacole exercises her own claim to full liberties and privileges.

Seacole forcefully intrudes her own Caribbean, free identity into the public space of the memoir's literary decorum. Though at times she feigns compliance, she does not go gently into that good world of Victorian decorum as she tells her self story. By calling attention to her self, Seacole flaunts her individuality in remarks like the following: "[If the events I write] be considered vain or egotistical, still I cannot help narrating them" (26); "I hope the reader will give me credit for the assertion that I am about to make, viz. that I enter upon the particulars of this chapter with great reluctance;

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


but I cannot omit them" (124); or "A few words more ere I bring these egotistical remarks to a close" (199). At such moments, she is in fact highly reminiscent of that Caribbean cultural type whose voice is her power, a "powerful instrument of attack and defense" (Mathurin 13).

And yet, Seacole does remain silent on some topics that would flesh out her representation of Caribbean womanhood. Except for a brief account of her parents, presented in the work's first pages, and discussing them only distantly in terms of their positive influences on her work ethic, her respect for military life, and her love of medicine, Seacole obscures the nature of her intimate relationships. Though she speaks time and again of "sons" of the Crimean War, she reveals little of her actual maternal status. At various points Seacole describes herself as traveling with "a little girl," "the little girl I have alluded to," or "my little maid" (13, 36, 85), but she does not elaborate. Alexis Soyer, a French chef in the Crimea who knew Seacole well, suggests that the little girl was Seacole's daughter (252, 334, 435). Was she? And what can we make of Seacole's silence about her private life and some of her experiences? Is Seacole's silence a way of resisting exploitation of the gaze, especially a military one? Of course, the reasons for her reticence could be personal. Perhaps Seacole did not want to make her daughter (if she was present at such places as the Crimea) into a literary spectacle. In the same way, Seacole might also have decided not to dwell on the fact that she herself was raised until the age of twelve by someone other than her mother. And yet, though these omissions are regrettable because they deny us specific information about the Caribbean woman's singular ways of motherhood, and her self-fashioning in the context of cultural/historical pressures, Seacole is clearly directing her words to a different audience that she knows well—British surgeons and soldier-patients she knew in Jamaica; the customers at her "British Hotel" at Kadikoi, Crimea; the many she nursed there; and the parents and soldiers who wrote letters of appreciation to her. This regard for her audience, and for the demands of book marketing,[14] lead her at times to become ostentatious, or even naive. But her manipulations of genre and rhetoric still suggest that this colonial writer struggled to negotiate within language a subjectivity identified with "difference" and originating in race, culture, and class. Furthermore, even as she utilized hegemonic literary tools and discourses, she asserted her resistance to their monopolies.

Though Seacole's generic and linguistic strategies serve to legitimize her as an "insider"—she "belongs"—at the same time she incorporates her "outsider/alien" status into the text, thus reflecting the tensions of this historical, post-Emancipation period. Emancipation itself was not unproblematic. The Act of Emancipation was short on enumerating the privileges of freedom to the newly freed, but very conscientious in delineating the privileges

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


for the powerful—that justices, for example, would be provided for with an annual income of four hundred pounds per annum, and that slaveowners would be appropriately remunerated.[15] Seacole recognizes herself to be a colonial subject of alterity, and as "colored," a double outsider. This status grants her the ability to position herself in a liminal space of the possible, her empowered control deriving from the Caribbean historical/ cultural circumstance, evolved from slave experience that allowed more fluidity in gender identity. She carried that positive value with her to the metropolitan center, and especially when its interventions are seen for what they attempted, the story she tells is compelling. A self-confident and headstrong heroine, Mary Seacole, I believe, intends all the effects produced by her generic and rhetorical strategies. Seacole's liminality is the basis of her own self-empowerment, making her the clearest proof that the "ability to absorb the contradictions of freedom may well be one of the most important legacies of emancipation for modern Caribbean societies" (Olwig 5). Or as she arrogantly and self-reliantly asserts from the beginning, "unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all" (147).

The cover of the original edition of *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands.*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


## NOTES

1. There is some controversy over the number of medals Seacole received. According to Alexander and Dewjee, the *Times* reported four government medals—the number also appearing on the bust of Seacole made by Queen Victoria's nephew, Count Gleichen. But only two are exhibited with this bust at the Institute of Jamaica: "the Order of the Mejidie, which was a commendation granted by the Turks to the British for outstanding service, and the French Legion of Honour" (36).
2. Extant texts by women in the Anglophone Caribbean are few: the slave narrative *History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831), and the collection of writings by the Hart sisters, Anne Hart Gilbert (1773–1834) and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites (1772–1833), texts that served them principally, however, to memorialize the significance of the Methodist Church in Antigua (see Ferguson). Apart from these, little else suggests the female voice except for such "texts" as some folk songs in J. B. Moreton's *West India Customs and Manners* (1793), Matthew (Monk) G. Lewis's *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1834), and Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log* (1833).
3. According to Foucault, a technology of power underlies modern societies, a mode that employs institutional codes of "disciplines" through which the individual is subjected. This technology differs from slavery because it is "not based on a relation of appropriation of bodies" ("Docile Bodies" 138).
4. Seacole is a premiere example of the colonial subject as immigrant, with her identity in dispute. Her worth and legitimacy were not indisputable facts in England, a condition of Caribbean exile later dramatized in such works as Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark,* George Lamming's *Water with Berries,* and V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men.* The narrator of Rhys's novel, Anna Morgan, for instance, has become emotionally alienated by emigrating to England, with its gender, race, and class biases. She seems completely disoriented: "It was as if a curtain had fallen hiding everything I had ever known." *Voyages* begins, "Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never fit them together" (7, 8).
5. The *OED* defines "sutler" as "one who follows an army or lives in a garrison town and sells provisions to the soldiers." Since excessive profit-making was often associated with sutlers, W. H. Russell felt the need to describe Seacole, in the preface he wrote to her work, as "the first who has redeemed the name of 'sutler' from the suspicion of worthlessness, mercenary baseness and plunder." In fact, the "adventure" in the title of Seacole's work may retain something of the eighteenth-century sense of "adventurer" as one who takes pecuniary risk, speculates, ventures into commercial enterprise (see Nerlich).
6. Pouchet Paquet draws on the rather extreme views in Bakhtin's essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," where, loathing idealism over social commitment, he criticizes what he terms the "adventurous-heroic" as driven by a desire "to have significance in the world of others." Though undoubtedly the product of an early twentieth-century concern with literary form, Bakhtin's argument also arises from political constraints. For more discussion of the significance of politics in Bakhtin, see Holquist.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Piers Compton gives the following account: "'It must be dedicated to the Queen,' [Fanny] told Selina. But the Queen had found nothing to admire in Mrs. Duberly's exploits at the front. The Queen considered that Fanny had forced herself into a province reserved for men, and sometimes without due regard for the natural prohibitions of her sex" (187).

The Crimean War indeed stirred great patriotic sentiment. The most famous of its heroines, Florence Nightingale, received such honors as a diamond-studded medallion from Queen Victoria, the St. George's Cross and Royal Cypher, the Royal Red Cross, and the King Edward Order of Merit. She was also made "Lady Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem," and gained some $50,000 from collections and benefits like those held for Seacole (see Reid 44).

Seacole, her sponsors, and her readers, would have been very familiar with the slave narrative. At mid-century, it was a well-marketed, popular genre; Douglass's *Narrative* went through five British editions between 1846 and 1847, and by 1850 close to 30,000 copies had been sold (Lorimer 4).

11. Robyn Warhol convincingly argues that such interruptions "projected . . . into the reading experience, serve to create self-agency" (vii).

12. For an interesting view on war myths and media propaganda, and the countering motivations of some women who joined the work forces, see Honey.

13. In this well-known story, the Englishman Inkle, when stranded on a Caribbean island, befriends the beautiful brown woman Yarico. At the end of this convenient affair, Inkle does not simply betray Yarico, but sells her into slavery. According to Peter Hulme, at least forty-five versions of this story, in three languages, have been published since the late eighteenth century.

14. Female lodging-house keepers were often linked to a prostitution/mistress grouping. This pattern did surface in such places as Bridgetown, Barbados, but not generally in Jamaica (Beckles, Heuman). According to Paulette A. Kerr, while in England few women owned and operated hospitality houses, in Jamaica 88 of the 157 such houses recorded in the 1844 census were owned by women (200).

15. Though some have found fault with the financial motivation of the work, by bringing economic common sense to the activity of writing Seacole would hardly be exceptional. Though "the best English writing was nourished in rural parsonages or country cottages, as the careers of the Bronte sisters and Jane Austen attest," Leslie Parker Hume and Karen M. Offen also note that "In each country, however, there were many women who turned to writing to supplement their incomes; this was one of the few types of work in which a needy middle-class woman could engage without losing social status" (280). "The golden goose can sell her eggs for a good price," Louisa May Alcott, the American author of *Little Women* and *Work* gleefully wrote in her November 1874 journal entry, when her publishers won a bidding war. Nor were Black writers of slave narratives or of fiction exempt from such considerations—Nancy Prince (*A Narrative of the Life and Travels*), Harriet Wilson (*Our Nig*), and Harriet Jacobs (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*) were all concerned with profit. In fact, "[m]ore than a few slave autobiographies were published as fundraisers for their narrators, and most were labeled so" (Andrews, "Uses" 108). Seacole must be placed within this pragmatic cadre.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


15. See Cap. LXXIII, "An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves [28th August 1833]." Except for forbidding treadmills, gross floggings, and capital punishments, the Statute barely addresses civil rights, while paying a great deal of attention to white compensation.

## WORKS CITED


Alcott, Louisa May. *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, and Journals.* Ed. Ednah D. Cherry. Boston: Roberts, 1889.

Alexander, Ziggi, and Audrey Dewjee. Introduction. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands.* By Mary Seacole. Ed. Alexander and Dewjee. Bristol: Falling Wall, 1984.

Andrews, William L. Introduction. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands.* By Mary Seacole. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

_____. "The Uses of Marginality 1850–1865." *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988. 167–204.

Bakhtin, M. M. "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays.* Ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: U of Texas P, 1990. 4–256.

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth. "Two autobiographical essays by Elizabeth Barrett." Ed. William S. Peterson. *Browning Institute Studies* 2 (1974): 119–34.

Beckles, Hilary McD. *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989.

Birkett, Dea. *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers.* New York: Blackwell, 1989.

Bush, Barbara. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650–1838.* London: Heinemann, 1990.

Carmichael, Mrs. (A. C.). *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the white, coloured, and Negro population of the West Indies.* 1833. New York: Negro UP, 1969.

Compton, Piers. *Colonel's Lady and Camp-Follower. The Story of Women in the Crimean War.* New York: St. Martin's, 1970.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom.* New York: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1855. *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies.* New York: Literary Classics of the US, 1994. 103–398.

Duberly, Henry, Mrs. *Journal Kept During the Russian War.* London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855.

Ferguson, Moira, ed. *The Hart Sisters: Early African Caribbean Writers, Evangelicals, and Radicals.* Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993.

"Festival at the Royal Surrey Gardens." *The Times,* 28 July 1857: 10.

Foucault, Michel. "Docile Bodies." *Discipline and Punish.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1985.

_____. *The History of Sexuality.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1980.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Fryer, Peter. "The Everyday Struggle, 1787–1833." *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain.* London: Pluto, 1984. 227–36.

Gagnier, Regenia. *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920.* London: Oxford UP, 1991.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism.* New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Gilroy, Paul. "Route Work: The Black Atlantic and the Politics of Exile." *The Post-Colonial Question.* Ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, 1996. 17–29.

Gundara, Jagdish S., and Ian Duffield, eds. *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain: From Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century.* Avebury: Ashgate, 1992.

Hall, Douglas. "Jamaica." *Neither Slave Nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World.* Ed. David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972. 193–213.

Hamalian, Leo, ed. *Ladies on the Loose: Women Travellers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1981.

Heuman, Gad J. *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792–1865.* Westport: Greenwood, 1981.

Holquist, Michael. Introduction. Bakhtin. ix–xlix.

Honey, Maureen. *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984.

Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797.* New York: Methuen, 1986.

Hume, Leslie Parker, and Karen M. Offen. "Introduction to Part III. The Adult Woman: Work." *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States.* Ed. Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen M. Offen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1981. 272–91.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: written by herself.* Ed. Lydia Maria Child. Boston: 1861, for the author.

Kerr, Paulette A. "Victims or Strategists: Female Lodging-house Keepers in Jamaica." *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective.* Shepherd, Brereton, and Bailey. 197–212.

Lamming, George, *Water with Berries.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971.

Lewis, Matthew (Monk) G. *Journal of a West India Proprietor.* London: J. Murray, 1834.

Lorimer, Douglas A. *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century.* Leicester: Leicester UP, 1978.

Mathurin, Lucille. *The Rebel Women in the British West Indies During Slavery.* Kingston: The Herald, 1975.

Middleton, Dorothy. *Victorian Lady Travellers.* London: Routledge, 1965.

Midgley, Clare. *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Moreton, J. B. *Manners and Customs in the West India Islands.* London: Richardson, 1793.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Mulvey, Christopher. *Transatlantic Manners: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo American Travel Writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Naipaul, V. S. *The Mimic Men.* New York: Macmillan, 1967.

Nerlich, Michael. *Ideology of Adventure.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.

Newton, Judith Lowder. *Women, Power, and Subversion in British Fiction, 1778–1860.* Athens: U of Georgia P, 1981.

Olney, James. "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *The Slave's Narrative.* Ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. 148–74.

Olwig, Karen, ed. *Small Islands, Large Questions: Society, Culture and Resistance in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean.* London: Cass, 1995.

Pouchet Paquet, Sandra. "The Enigma of Arrival: The *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands.*" *African American Review* 26.4 (1992): 651–63.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Prince, Mary. *History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave.* London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1831.

Reid, Douglas Arthur, M.D. *Memories of the Crimea War.* London: St. Catherine, 1911.

Rhys, Jean. *Voyage in the Dark.* London: Deutsch, 1967.

Rushdie, Salmon. *The Satanic Verses.* New York: Viking Penguin, 1988.

Sanders, Valerie. *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth Century England.* New York: St. Martin's, 1989.

Scott, Michael. *Tom Cringle's Log.* London: T. Cadell, 1833.

Seacole, Mary. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands.* London: James Blackwood, 1857. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Shepherd, John. *The Crimean Doctors: A History of the British Medical Services in the Crimean War.* 2 vols. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1991.

Shepherd, Verene, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey. *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective.* London: James Currey, 1996.

Shyllon, F. O. *Black People in Britain, 1555–1833.* London: Oxford UP, 1977.

Soyer, Alexis. *Soyer's Culinary Campaign: Being Historical Reminiscences of the Late War.* London: Routledge, 1857.

Stoler, Ann Laura. "Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves." *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things.* Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

Taylor, Fanny. *Eastern Hospitals and English Nurses: the Narrative of twelve months experience in the hospitals of Koulali and Scutari.* London: Hurst and Blackett, 1856.

Underhill, Edward Bean. *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Condition.* 1862. Westport, CT: Negro UP, 1970.

Warhol, Robyn R. "The Victorian Place of Enunciation: Gender and the Chance to Speak." Ch. 7. *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel.* Piscataway: Rutgers UP, 1989.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Wilson, Harriet. *Our Nig, or, Sketches from the life of a free Black in a two-story white house, north, showing that slavery's shadows fall even there.* Boston: Rand and Avery, 1859.

Yaston, Elizabeth. "The Autobiographer and her Readers: From Apology to Affirmation." *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism.* Ed. Estelle C. Jelinek. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980. 93–111.

Young, Robert J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race.* London: Routledge, 1995.

Zavala, Iris M. "Representing the Colonial Subject." *1492–1992: Re/Discovering Colonial Writing.* Ed. René Jara and Nicholas Spaduccini. Minneapolis: Prisma Institute, 1989. 323–48.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: THE CASE OF DAVID BEN-GURION

MICHAEL KEREN

As is well known, David Ben-Gurion had an enormous impact on the history of modern Israel. Rarely have one person's thoughts, decisions, and actions had such an effect, for not only is the writing of Israeli history dominated by the towering figure of Ben-Gurion, but that history—in fact, the history of the entire Jewish people in the modern era—often takes the form of life-writing by or about Ben-Gurion. Therefore, Ben-Gurion biography and Israeli historiography are strongly interrelated. This may allow us to observe transformations in Israeli historiography by observing changes in the biographical literature on Ben-Gurion, which itself impacts these changes.

By outlining these transformations, this paper attempts to both highlight the relationship between biographical work and historiographical change, and to provide a conceptual framework for an analysis of that relationship. The case study discussed here allows us to do so because of Ben-Gurion's dominance in modern Israeli history, but there is reason to believe that the relationship may hold in a wide range of cases. This is so because biographical work is an important part of any society's self-consciousness about its history—and "historiography" may be defined as such self-consciousness. My argument is that biographies published on political leaders in a given polity play an important historiographical role, and may be analyzed both in terms of the historiographical trends they reflect, and the impact they have on these trends. The exact nature of the relationship between biography and historiography could of course be determined only after wide comparative analysis. One would want to know, for instance, how the biographies of Churchill, De Gaulle, Gandhi, Mandela, Nasser, and others written over the years reflect and affect historiographical changes in these leaders' respective countries. Though one case study is obviously

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

replacement for such a comparative study, it may be helpful in demonstrating the usefulness of exploring the biography-historiography relationship and in providing a conceptual framework for such an endeavor.

In what follows, I propose a typology for the classification of biographies, and analyze changes over time in categories of Ben-Gurion life-writing in relation to changing historiographical trends. I conclude with a note on the usefulness of the conceptual framework proposed here for future research.

## THE TYPOLOGY

Biographies are mostly classified by their subjects. Bookstores, for instance, sort them by the name of the person whose life is being told (Lenin's biography, Kennedy's biography, and so on), or by a broader occupational category (literary biography for writers, political biography for political leaders). Current biographical research is often interested in classifications like "new" vs. "old" or "modernist" vs. "post-modernist" biography. The typology proposed in Figure 1 is concerned no less with the biographer than with the subject of the biography. I employ two criteria: "orientation," defined by the overall approach the biographer takes towards the subject; and "focus," defined by the perspective the biographer takes on the subject's position in his or her environment.

FIGURE 1. VARIABLES FOR THE ANALYSIS OF BIOGRAPHIES.

| ORIENTATION | IDENTIFICATION | INVESTIGATION | UTILIZATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| FOCUS | PERSONAL | CONTEXTUAL | MYTHOLOGICAL |

### 1. THE ORIENTATION CRITERION

Identification, investigation, and utilization are the three variables of orientation.

#### A. IDENTIFICATION

Biographers may approach a subject with a feeling that by telling the life story, their own lives are affected. Such identification does not necessarily have to involve a positive approach to the subject, although it most likely does. In theory, one may identify with a subject whose evil character is

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

being recognized. Although identification is often seen as stemming from psychological motives, this does not necessarily have to be the case: one may identify with the subject of a biography on sociological grounds, for instance, as when the subject fulfills a social function, or provides political symbols to a community lacking them.

### B. INVESTIGATION

A biography may also be written as a means to learn in a "cool" manner about the subject, whether as a study by itself, or as part of a broader study. Although it has traditionally been seen as a unique intellectual endeavor, biography is often part of the human or social sciences by which we learn about ourselves. This orientation to life-writing could be operationalized by an adherence to rules of investigation common in other fields, such as relative detachment between writer and subject, some actual use of social science methods, and so on.

### C. UTILIZATION

This third variable refers to the writer's use of the subject as a means to advance a broader agenda. Time and resources are invested in life-telling to make a point. This broader agenda may be explicit or implicit, and the utilization may vary between subtle use and vulgar manipulation.

## 2. THE FOCUS CRITERION

A personal, contextual, and mythological focus map out the three variables here.

### A. THE PERSONAL FOCUS

The biographer may focus on the person whose life is being told. While family, community, society, polity, culture, and other contextual factors are of course referred to, the individual will always remain at center stage. Traditionally this is what biography was expected to do, and in most cases it probably still does.

### B. THE CONTEXTUAL FOCUS

Here the biographer focuses more on the contextual factors within which the subject of the biography operates. By closing the distance between biography, history, and social science, this variable stresses the individual in

CC-0. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

context rather than in person, and deals with the interaction between a specific life and the social, economic, cultural, and political environment in which that life, or for that matter every life, is conducted.

### C. THE MYTHOLOGICAL FOCUS

When concentrating on individuals, biographies in this category focus not on a real person, but on someone greater than life. Similarly when such biographies focus on context, the broader setting they discover tends to be more imagined than real. These two mythic dimensions could be expected to coincide. A biography of a mythological figure would, for instance, most probably also be situated in a messianic context—one devoid of real time and place. Although the distinction between the real and the imagined is not always easy to operationalize, this variable has great theoretical importance because it distinguishes between reality and myth in life-writing.

As shown in Figure 2, the orientation and focus criteria, designating three variables each, provide us with nine types of biographies distinguished by the biographer, rather than by the subject of the biography.

FIGURE 2. NINE TYPES OF BIOGRAPHIES DISTINGUISHED BY ORIENTATION AND FOCUS.

| | IDENTIFICATION | INVESTIGATION | UTILIZATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| PERSONAL | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| CONTEXTUAL | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| MYTHOLOGICAL | 3 | 6 | 9 |

#### 1. IDENTIFICATION-PERSONAL

The biographer engages in writing the life of another, usually admired person, as part of a personal search for identity.

#### 2. IDENTIFICATION-CONTEXTUAL

Here the biographer displays a similar admiration, affection, or empathy for the communal setting which the biography's subject epitomizes.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

### 3. IDENTIFICATION-MYTHOLOGICAL

This identification is oriented towards the image of the subject or the context, either of which, possibly as a result of an initial need for identification, has grown to the proportions of myth.

### 4. INVESTIGATION-PERSONAL

The biographer investigates the subject because of a scholarly or intellectual interest in the person, or in human behavior in general.

### 5. INVESTIGATION-CONTEXTUAL

A biography belonging to this category resembles other projects of social science research in its relatively detached analysis of those social, economic, cultural, or political factors illuminated by the subject's life story.

### 6. INVESTIGATION-MYTHOLOGICAL

Here the biographer's investigation is preoccupied with mythological figures or settings—mostly, one may expect, in an attempt to break these myths.

### 7. UTILIZATION-PERSONAL

This category refers mainly to psychoanalytical work, in which biographical writing is used to test professional theories.

### 8. UTILIZATION-CONTEXTUAL

These biographies are written to justify a position prevailing in the public discourse. A societal or political agenda is advanced by emphasizing the deeds and mishaps of the biographies' subjects in public life.

### 9. UTILIZATION-MYTHOLOGICAL

This category refers to the explicit manipulation of myths by ideologically oriented biographers as part of their realization that myths disseminated in any polity play an important part in recruiting mass support.

* * * * *

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


As in every construction of a typology, a few words of caution are in order. First, biographies are usually more complex than an analytical categorization can capture. As a result, it must be expected that single biographies will often fall into more than one cell of the typology. Second, since biographies by definition deal with individuals, their allusions to conceptual and mythological dimensions may be more subtle than the above categorization implies. Third, biographers are obviously not obliged to follow the historiographical periods identified by the researcher. Such trends do not constitute a deterministic model. Different types of biographies which succeed each other in one context may coincide in another. Furthermore, any apparent trend in life-writing will have its exceptions, since the personal preferences of biographers may override more general historical determinants. And yet, having said this, I wish to suggest that the typology I have described can serve as a means for showing how Ben-Gurion life-writing can point us toward historiographical trends as they unfold and succeed one another over time. In fact, Ben-Gurion biographies actually follow a rather clear path corresponding to an identifiable transformation in Israeli historiography. After providing a short description of Ben-Gurion's life, I shall describe this path.

## BEN-GURION: A BRIEF HISTORY

David Green, who later changed his name to Ben-Gurion, was born in 1886 in the small town of Plonsk in Russian-dominated Poland. His primary education was in the traditional Jewish manner, learning the Bible, the Talmud, and books of prayer in small rabbinical schools. Czarist rules restricting the number of students in Eastern Europe prevented the young man, intending to sail to Palestine as an engineer, from gaining a high school education. Like many leaders of his generation, then, he was largely self-taught. In 1906 Ben-Gurion went to Palestine as a pioneer. In 1911 he went to Constantinople to study law, but after the outbreak of World War I he was expelled from the Ottoman Empire for his involvement in Zionist agitation. He returned to Palestine from the United States in 1918, and became a major leader of the Jewish workers' movement. In 1920 he was one of the cofounders of the General Federation of Labor (Histadrut), and served as its secretary general for fifteen years. In the early 1930s he led the struggle which gave the Jewish labor movement in Palestine control over the World Zionist Organization, then guiding the Jewish efforts to settle in Palestine. Soon becoming the main leader of the Jewish community in Palestine, he led the struggle against British rule, as Britain had received a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

mandate over Palestine from the League of Nations after World War I. In 1947, he accepted the United Nations resolution to partition Palestine between its Jewish and Arab inhabitants, who had been feuding or at war since the turn of the century. With the withdrawal of the British military from Palestine, on May 14 he proclaimed the Jewish state, and led Israel's war of independence against the ensuing Arab invasion. In the 1950s, as its first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Ben-Gurion led Israel's state-building efforts—absorbing Jewish immigrants from all over the world, establishing a working democracy, and constructing a modern army and various economic enterprises. In 1953, as part of his call for young Jews to settle the Negev desert, he moved his residence to Sde Boker, a desert Kibbutz. In 1963, he resigned as a result of a fierce political struggle with his own Labor party apparatus. The rift led him in 1965 to form his own political party, named Rafi, but the party received little support, and the aging man found himself rather isolated in Sde Boker at the end of his life. Ben-Gurion died in 1973.

## BEN-GURION BIOGRAPHIES

The fascination with Ben-Gurion all over the world quite naturally led to a great number of biographies being written in Israel and elsewhere. In addition, his life, thoughts, and deeds have been recurrent themes both in literature and in historical studies. His vast scholarly and intellectual activity, which he harnessed to the tasks of state building, represented an important component of his leadership, placing him at the center of Israeli discourse, which he dominated for three decades. Though a full demonstration of his impact on Israeli historiography would require examining huge amounts of material, even observing only those works belonging most clearly to the biographical genre—a partial list appears in the works cited—demonstrates the roles his life story has played in Israel from the establishment of the state to the present.

Early biographies, written shortly after the establishment of the state, clearly identify Ben-Gurion with a myth. From the 1960s onward, however, a restlessness with this myth evolves, especially among novelists, who pointed the way towards a self-conscious investigation of that myth and how it functioned in Israeli society. Such self-consciousness may be the reason for the appearance of biographies, especially in the 1980s, which can be characterized as contextual investigations of Ben-Gurion's Israel. Side by side with this trend, however, biographies also began to be written which fall into the "utilization-contextual" category—namely, biographies which

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


take a side in political controversies either that Ben-Gurion was involved in or that preoccupy his biographers. Ben-Gurion's biographies may thus be described as roughly following over the years the trend marked in the typology by cells 3-6-5-8, as shown in Figure 3.

Though as I have already mentioned, there are variations, such as very personal biographies published as part of the celebrations of Ben-Gurion's one-hundredth anniversary, which would fall into cell 1, or psychoanalytical and other personal work on Ben-Gurion—the volumes by Peres and Teicher, for instance—which would fall into cell 7, the trend indicated by the arrow is both easy to identify and to understand from an historiographical perspective.

FIGURE 3. CHANGE OVER TIME IN THE TYPES OF BEN-GURION BIOGRAPHIES.

| | IDENTIFICATION | INVESTIGATION | UTILIZATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| PERSONAL | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| CONTEXTUAL | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| MYTHOLOGICAL | 3 | 6 | 9 |

## 1. THE FIRST ERA

The early biographies, such as those by Habas and Regev, published during Ben-Gurion's term as Prime Minister, are characterized by deep identification with a figure greater than life, so much so that Ben-Gurion had to defend himself against the claim that a cult of personality had evolved around him. This mystical approach is particularly apparent in biographies written by Jews living outside Israel, mainly in the United States. The cover of *New York Times* writer Gertrude Samuels's biography announces that it presents "an unbiased and absorbing profile of the rebel and nation-builder who willed the destiny of modern Israel." Inside the book, the rebel turns into a messiah. From the first page, for example, we are introduced to such familiar biblical images as a desert convoy and beleaguered Jewish travelers:

> The convoy streaking up the road under the pitiless sun seemed to be the only moving thing in the tawny desolation of the desert. There were jeeps of armed soldiers before and behind the official jeep, and they were men in a hurry. Infiltrators from the nearby Arab countries and nomads hostile to Israel had killed travelers on this pass through the Negev that ribboned from Eilat to Beersheva. The men were making haste for safety. (2)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

First-Era Biography: Ben-Gurion the state builder, presiding over the declaration of the State of Israel (courtesy of the Ben-Gurion House Internet Site).

Into this scary, hostile environment, Ben-Gurion will soon enter as an anchor of confidence. The contrast between the jeeps and soldiers hurrying through dangerous terrain, and the white-haired man who will make the one green spot in the desert, Kibbutz Sde Boker, his home, allows the biographer to present him as one who will redeem the Jewish people from their sad history, a triumphal portrait common to biographies of this era.

Samuels dedicates *B-G, Fighter of Goliaths* "To the children who fell in the ghettos and concentration camps. They never reached Israel." Her work, and other biographies falling into the same category, present Ben-Gurion as sharing those children's origins. His birthplace in Poland is portrayed as a traditional Jewish Ghetto characterized by danger and poverty:

> In small, industrial Plonsk with its cobbled streets and modest houses, nearly two thirds of the twenty thousand inhabitants were Jews who lived in the Pale of Settlement. Most were poor people who put all their faith in God and the Hasidic (mystical) rabbis, a mass of humanity frozen in rigid orthodoxy. (34)

Such faith, it is suggested, virtually ensured these families' fates. "But not the Green family," Samuels insists, and several other American biographers also stress how the exposure of the Green family to modernist intellectual and cultural influences allowed the young David to reach his own conclu-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


sion that the only hope for Jews living in such ghettos lay in immigration to Israel. Such biographies map out a narrative common among Jews fascinated by the Zionist endeavor in Palestine. According to this story, modern Jewish history followed a clear route whereby oppression in the ghetto was succeeded by exposure to early twentieth century enlightenment, and then proceeded to Zionism. The emphasis on the traditional environment of Plonsk, and its helplessness, thus prepares the reader for Ben-Gurion, "the lion of the desert," who manifests in his personality everything Jewish life in the past two thousand years lacked: sovereignty, strength, and international recognition. Or as Samuels puts it, "His life, from boyhood pioneer in Poland and farmer in Palestine, to journalist, labor leader, soldier, politician, diplomat, and world leader, dramatizes the rise of modern Israel and its place of moral strength in the world" (254).

A biography by Barnet Litvinoff contrasts even more strongly the victorious life story of Ben-Gurion with the defeat and agony characterizing Jewish life in the past. Litvinoff's opening pages describe his arrival in New York in 1951 in terms reminiscent of triumph parades of the Roman emperors:

> ... a million citizens left their homes and offices to line the streets of Manhattan and to give a frenzied welcome to the stocky, bronzed figure, of leonine profile, as he drove in an open car to pay his respects to the Mayor. At the center of a triumphal procession which included 2,000 members of the American armed forces, the white-haired little man was carried to the sounds of martial music and past cheering crowds, as far as the tip of the island. (2)

"The island" here of course is Ellis Island, the landing dock for thousands of Jews escaping the horrors of Jewish life in the pale of settlement, and arriving on the safe shores of America at the turn of the century. However offended they might be by Ben-Gurion's frequent declarations that Jewish life in the twentieth century can only be lived in Israel, Litvinoff and other Jewish biographers living abroad nevertheless contrasted his life story to their own, and saw in it the true fulfillment of biblical prophecies and dreams.

Even a biographer like Dan Kurzman, whose identification is more with the man than with the myth, considers the life of Ben-Gurion as something more than the story of an extraordinary man: "It is the story of a Biblical prophecy, an eternal dream" (17). Based on dozens of interviews, Kurzman's biography came out in 1983, long after the mystical era in Israeli historiography was over. Though Kurzman, a journalist by trade, dealt with many questions typical of the "investigation-contextual" category, he

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Biographical subjects as First-Era Heroes: Ben-Gurion with John F. Kennedy (1961) and Winston S. Churchill (1961) (courtesy of the Ben-Gurion House Internet Site).

still used messianic overtones when invoking Ben-Gurion and the State of Israel, and especially when dealing with the proclamation of the state on May 14, 1948: "Tel-Aviv bakes in the sultry heat of Hamsin, a merciless desert wind that seems to suggest a desire by God to test the fortitude and endurance of His chosen people even on this day of redemption—May 14, 1948" (19).

### B: THE SECOND ERA

Israelis have never found the messianic overtones attached to the country and its leader easy to bear. Several novels, notably Aharon Meged's *The Living on the Dead,* address the difficulties of living in the shadow of a towering figure. Published in 1965, Meged's novel tells the story of a writer facing trial for not completing the epic story of the legendary founding father Davidov—a transparent reference to Ben-Gurion's first name "David." The novel explores the tormented conscience of a generation haunted by its own commitment to perform in a way Ben-Gurion demanded of it. He had called upon Israelis to build a state that would constitute "a light unto the nations," but this was not easy for Israelis. The tasks of state building were often hard enough without the additional burden of a messianic ideology. In response, Meged's protagonist falls into nihilism, scattering the pages of the book of Davidov, never to be completed. "I do not want an ambush in my home," he writes, "a nest of rustling memories under my bed, eyes observing my thoughts! I want to be my own master. I want rest" (229).

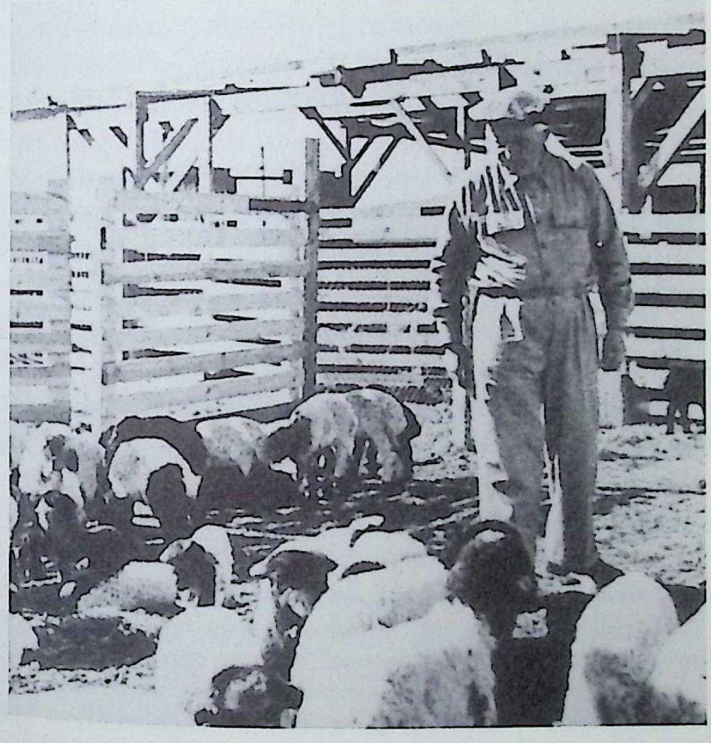
The quest for rest, or for *A Perfect Peace,* as the title of Amos Oz's 1982 novel on the end of the Ben-Gurion era would have it, led to a different

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection. Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


approach to biography. After Ben-Gurion stepped down from power in the mid-1960s, biography took a far more investigatory-personal turn. In his important 1959 Ben-Gurion biography, Robert St. John had already taken a rather non-mystical approach to the Prime Minister, trying instead to describe his leadership from a political perspective. Only in the 1970s, however, did the investigatory orientation take a firmer hold—though not without difficulty, for as biographer Michael Bar-Zohar admitted in *The Armed Prophet* in 1966, it was still a struggle to achieve any distance from his subject, or to avoid total absorption by the towering figure. "I have tried to be impartial," Bar-Zohar writes, "but, like all those who write the lives of great men in history, I have found it very difficult. No ordinary criterion can be applied to Ben-Gurion. And his colleagues and associates seem small, pale figures besides this David who is Goliath" (viii).

This admission is interesting because Bar-Zohar was himself one of those associates, and in fact, however much he may have talked about escaping the myth, Bar-Zohar frequently utilized it during those political struggles he participated in side by side with Ben-Gurion. When Ben-Gurion,



Biography takes a personal turn: Ben-Gurion in Sde Boker, 1953 (courtesy of the Ben-Gurion House Internet Site). CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

disenchanted by the Labor party leadership, formed the Rafi party in 1965, Bar-Zohar was one of the close disciples who joined him. Furthermore, his biography, based on Ben-Gurion's private papers, could be seen as a tool in the political struggle within Israel's labor movement in the 1960s. At the same time, though, this biography does also represent a move towards the realization, if not yet the practice, that life-telling must take an impartial turn. Or as Bar-Zohar puts it:

> a day will come when other biographers, protected by the wall of time against the passions and feelings of the moment, will be able to bring impartial minds to the examination of the phenomenon called Ben-Gurion. They will probably have more sources and documents to draw upon, and in any case will know what succeeds the Ben-Gurion period and how the State of Israel develops. (viii)

What ultimately made for a more impartial trend in Ben-Gurion life-writing was the development of a self-conscious scholarship in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, studies in economics, sociology, political science, and modern history flourished in academia, and as I have described elsewhere, important studies stripped the figure of Ben-Gurion of its messianic dimensions and placed him in the state-building context. Particularly important was an article by historian Israel Kolatt which set the stage for self-conscious research on Ben-Gurion in the years ahead. Kolatt explicitly raised methodological and ethical problems involved in the study of Israeli history in light of Ben-Gurion's life. Even in the case of a towering leader like Ben-Gurion, Kolatt warns, a personality cannot be treated as a manifestation of the entire objective and subjective factors operating in a people's history. Kolatt also mentions Tolstoy's criticism of a view of history as the making of great leaders, though he goes on to suggest that the more complex the social and technological systems within which we operate, the more important decisions by leaders are.

Following Kolatt's example, other studies began to analyze Ben-Gurion's leadership vis-à-vis the institutions and processes he shaped and operated within. At this point, traditional biography largely gave way to theory. Abraham Avi-hai's approach is typical:

> The last few decades have seen new attempts to study leadership as a social, political and psychological phenomenon. A wide and growing bibliography examines facets of leadership, and attempts have been made to apply these new approaches to the study of leaders. . . . [T]he present work is not conceived as a broad survey of leadership, nor as a case study using the tools of these newer attempts. It is rather limited to one man, one political system, one set of circumstances, in a specific period. (8)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


### C. THE THIRD ERA

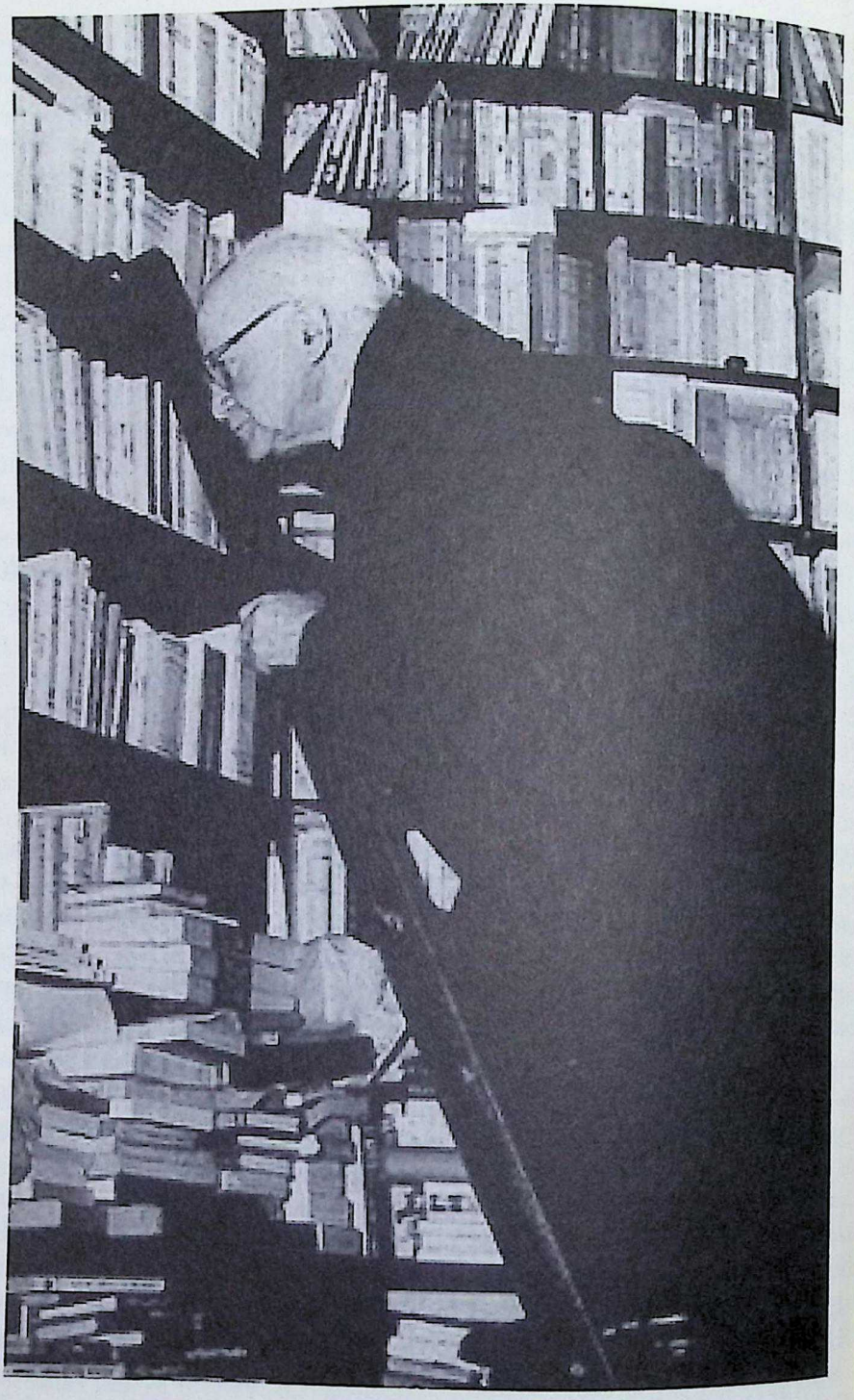
Spanning the past four decades, the most extensive biographical effort on Ben-Gurion has been Shabtai Tevet's series of volumes. The enormous detail with which Tevet treats Ben-Gurion's life places these volumes in every possible cell of my typology. I would argue, however, that while this work constitutes an important investigation of the man and the context in which he operated, Tevet's extraordinary devotion to his subject ultimately places this work in the "utilization-contextual" category. What I am referring to here is Tevet's tendency to continue the political fights Ben-Gurion waged during his lifetime by engaging in fierce, highly public, political discourse over Ben-Gurion's actions and decisions. Even as he wrote the overall biography, Tevet frequently published monographs devoted to those controversies. In 1996, for example, in *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust,* Tevet makes explicit his intention to play a part in evaluating Ben-Gurion's efforts during the holocaust. "While the holocaust was still at its height," Tevet writes, "it was already being politicized":

> During and after the war-years—and continuing to the present day—the Zionist leadership of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) was accused not only of indifference to the fate of European Jews but of actual responsibility for their deaths through collaboration with the Nazis. (xix)

Tevet describes the historiographical literature on the subject as resembling the film *Rashomon,* in which each witness has a different version of the same horrific crime, shaped by ulterior motives and the desire to blame others. One version is that of historians who argue that "in their supposedly single-minded focus on the creation of the Jewish state in Palestine," Zionist leaders there, and especially David Ben-Gurion, who was serving at the time as chairman of the Jewish Agency (the governing body of the Jewish community in pre-state Israel), "were willing to sacrifice the non-Zionist Jews of Europe in furtherance of their goal" (xix). A counterversion is that of writers such as Tevet himself, who argue that beyond a few spurious sources, there is no support for such charges against Ben-Gurion and the Zionist leadership. "Indeed, my own research," writes Tevet, "unequivocally refutes these charges and demonstrates beyond question that Ben-Gurion's thinking was quite the opposite of what his critics allege: if he could have rescued all the Jews of Europe by sacrificing the state, he would have done it" (xxi). The biographer is therefore as explicit as can be about his role: "This work, then, is another pro-Ben-Gurion voice in the politicized debate on Jewish

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Biography in the Third Era: Ben-Gurion as Researcher and Subject (courtesy of the Ben-Gurion House Internet Site).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


rescue efforts during the holocaust. Its aim is to examine the charges of collaboration and murderous indifference and to document Ben-Gurion's efforts to rescue the Jewish people" (xxi).

In the same manner, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, another spin-off from Tevet's huge biographical work, suggests that Ben-Gurion's thinking on the relations between Jews and Palestinians not only warrants study because it is influential and exemplary, but also because it has been misinterpreted. There is a view abroad, resting almost exclusively on Ben-Gurion's own public pronouncements, Tevet writes, that Ben-Gurion was naive about the depth of Arab political aspirations and Arab determination to resist the Zionist transformation of Palestine. This view may be refuted, Tevet contends, by the biographer's tools; that is, by comparing these pronouncements to Ben-Gurion's private reflections, committed to paper in his diary, in letters, and in the protocols of closed meetings.

Tevet's work can therefore be seen as representing a growing trend in today's historiography: the turning of historical writing in general, and of biographical writing in particular, into a battlefield. Impressed by an apparently close tie between knowledge and power, "post-modernist" scholars leave little room for historical writing, or for that matter, for life-telling devoid of political connotations. In this context, Ben-Gurion scholars are classified not by intellectual or methodological categories, but by their position vis-à-vis their subject—either in general ("pro" vs. "con"), or in regard to particular situations. There are those, for instance, who support Ben-Gurion's strategic and tactical moves during the War of Independence, and those who emphasize his mistakes. There are those who consider him a democrat, and those who consider him an authoritarian, and so on. These historical rivalries often quite accurately mirror broader political positions. Led by Tevet, the "old historians," who are supportive of Ben-Gurion, are also associated with the Labor party, while the "new historians," who mostly represent a radical left, attack Ben-Gurion for his harsh policies vis-à-vis Palestinian Arabs, his activist foreign policy, his failure to negotiate peace in the Middle East in the early 1950s, and his sense of adventurism, especially with regards to his decision to join England and France in the Sinai campaign of 1956. It is hard to tell whether this politicization of historical discourse, in Israel and elsewhere, is a passing trend, or whether it will have a lasting impact on historical research and biographical writing in the country.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## CONCLUSION

Biographical writing plays an important role in the process by which a society develops a self-consciousness about its history. Though the social sciences frequently place biography as secondary to deterministic and probabilistic models of social action, even they can not deny the importance of this role. Life-writing, particularly of political figures, is a component of our historiographical thinking. Among other things, it tells us who we are and where we are going. And since biography and historiography are interrelated, it will be worthwhile to develop conceptual tools that allow us to explore that interrelationship.

The typology of biographies proposed in this study has allowed us to observe changes in Ben-Gurion life-writing with reference to major historiographical trends—mainly the trend from an identification with the myth of Ben-Gurion, to a tendency to utilize his life story as part of the political battles of the day. Since historical research has always played a major role in Israel's political battles, the utilization of Ben-Gurion life-writing to make political points should not be surprising. But the trend whereby the subject of biography moves from a mythic to a non-mystical figure may extend beyond the Israeli context. One, for instance, might predict that the trend signified in the typology by cells 3-6-5 might be apparent in other countries, and mainly new ones. In the new countries of Asia and Africa, which received independence after World War II, mythological leaders played an important role in the struggles for independence, and in the mobilization of support afterwards. Biographies have always been an effective means for the perpetuation of such myths. In many of these countries, however, the "morning after" independence led to that self-reflection often associated with abandonment of the myth. State building, at least where it partly succeeded, came to be associated not only with such figures as Nasser, Nehru, Castro, or Kenyatta, but also with the social and political settings, however imperfect, these figures shaped. As a result, serious research on biographies written in these settings (or about them, when non-democratic governments exist which prevent open biographical work) may prove to be as revealing about the settings as about the leaders' myths.

Whether the trend of politicization found in the Israeli context will occur elsewhere depends on several factors. Such politicizing has definitely occurred in Western countries in which post-modern intellectual trends have taken hold. Ultimately then, the degree of politicization may depend on the degree to which post-modernism will prove to be a passing fashion or a sound and stable component of our historical consciousness. Whatever

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


the outcome, it may be worthwhile to watch the interplay between categories 5 and 8 in biographical writing; that is, between biographies written with the intent to investigate political figures in their context, and those concerned mainly with political justification.

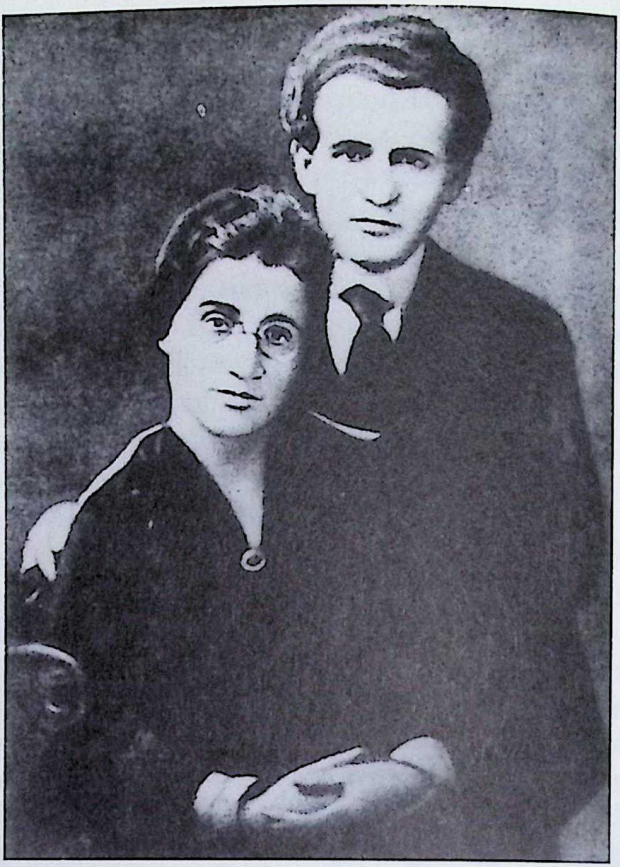
Nor are the trends giving rise to biographies that fit into category 8 exclusively scholarly. The growing public and media attention to political biographies, measured by the large number of biographies reviewed in literary supplements all over the world, is raising the demand that a biographer should contribute to prevailing themes in the political discourse. The days of the biographer whose main concern is life-telling, as represented by categories 1 or 4, may be over—at least for the time being.

Another general trend worth investigating could be represented by arrows leading from category 9 to categories 4, 5, or 6. We may expect to see this trend where the totalitarian grip is being loosened, such as those countries in Eastern Europe now struggling on the road to democracy. Totalitarian countries explicitly manipulate myths; as totalitarianism diminishes, an era of investigation begins which not surprisingly focuses on the persons, and contexts, or on the myths themselves, and the processes used for their construction and dissemination. It would be useful to investigate biographical writing in light of this trend, for not only is the myth of political leaders a major building block of totalitarian regimes, but the way this myth is handled later may give us important clues for an understanding of the ways in which such countries are coping with their new freedoms.

Examples like these should suffice to point to the possibilities opened to us by an investigation of biography as reflecting, and inducing, historiographical changes. Just as political leadership plays a role in our lives, so do the mental pictures we develop of that leadership. Do we consider leaders to be human beings, or super-humans greater than life? Are we able to maintain an objective perspective in our approach to them, or do they play a major role in the construction of our own self? Is our approach to politics one of concern with social, economic, and cultural factors, or are we merely concerned with personalities, or with mythological images of these personalities? Are we myth perpetuators, or capable of investigation of our own myths? How capable are we of thinking in historical terms, or rather in making history part of our current affairs—thus heating up the political discourse on the one hand, and fighting the wars of the past on the other? Biography, I would conclude, may play a far more important role than has been realized in the construction of such alternating mental pictures. A systematic investigation of this genre may thus enhance our understanding of our political history.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Pola and David Ben-Gurion, 1917 (courtesy of the Ben-Gurion House Internet Site).

## NOTES

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wish to thank my research assistant Gabriela Fisman for her good advice and help.

## WORKS CITED

Avi-hai, Avraham. *Ben-Gurion State Builder: Principles and Pragmatism 1948–1963.* New York: Wiley, 1974.

Bar-Zohar, Michael. *The Armed Prophet: A Biography of David Ben-Gurion.* London: Arthur Barker, 1967.

Habas, Bracha. *David Ben-Gurion Ve'doro* [David Ben-Gurion and His Generation]. Tel Aviv: Massada, 1952.

Keren, Michael. *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals: Power, Knowledge, and Charisma.* De Kalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1983.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Kolatt, Israel. "David Ben-Gurion Ve'doro" [David Ben-Gurion and His Generation]. *Halom ve'hagshamato* [A Dream and Its Fulfillment]. Ed. Yehi'am Padan. Tel-Aviv: Missrad Habita'hon, 1979. 142–69.

Kurzman, Dan. *Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983.

Levinoff, Barnet. *Ben-Gurion of Israel.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954.

Megged, Aharon. *Ha-hai 'al ha-met* [The Living on the Dead]. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965.

Omer, Dvora. *El rosh ha-har* [To Climb the Mountain]. Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1965.

Oz, Amos. *Menuhah nekhonah* [A Perfect Peace]. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982.

Peres, Shimon. *Lekh 'im ha-anashim* [Go with the Men]. Jerusalem: Idanim, 1979.

Segev, Yossef. *David Ben-Gurion.* Tel Aviv: Histadrut, n.d.

Samuels, Gertrude. *B-G, Fighter of Goliaths: The Story of David Ben-Gurion.* New York: Crowell, 1961.

St. John, Robert. *Ben-Gurion: The Biography of an Extraordinary Man.* New York: Doubleday, 1959.

Tevet Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1996.

———. *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.

———. *Ki'nat David* [David's Jealousy]. 3 vols. Jerusalem: Schocken, 1977, 1980, 1987.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# "THE BRIGHT BONE OF A DREAM": DRAMA, PERFORMATIVITY, RITUAL, AND COMMUNITY IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *RUNNING IN THE FAMILY*

S. LEIGH MATTHEWS

*The part always has a tendency to reunite with its whole in order to escape from its imperfections.*

—Leonardo da Vinci

*I go back there a lot now and I go back to complete myself, I think.*

—Michael Ondaatje, Interview with Ariel Dorfman

Given the popularity of performance theory in modern day academic circles, and the open-ended definition of the word "performance" provided by such theorists as Richard Schechner,[1] it is inevitable that the long-accepted analogy of "life as theatre" would be extended to that particular literary genre known as "autobiography," or more inclusively, as "life writing."[2] While many literary critics have made the connection between life writing and dramatic technique, Evelyn J. Hinz's 1992 essay "Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography" fully articulates a "poetics" of life writing which highlights the genre's "dramatic affinities" (195). Using Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1992) as my example, I would like to suggest that in certain texts the type of performance is ritual in nature—a reiterative therapeutic act, before an audience, meant to aid the writer in enacting a public performance of the marginalized self as a way of reintegrating that self into its familial/communal origins. Even Ondaatje's earliest works display his preoccupation with both performance and communal identity. I am also suggesting that Ondaatje's choice of the memoir form for *Running* underscores this concern with reintegrating self and social context through performance, and further, that the public representation of communal

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


selfhood in *Running* is in fact a "metasocial performance" that exposes the limitations of Western concepts of subjectivity and historiography.

Hinz locates the beginning of the "dramatic lineage of auto/biography" in Aristotle's *Poetics,* the "oldest attempt to define the generic features of drama" (198).[3] Like drama, auto/biographical documents have "an element of conflict and dialogue, a sense of performance and/or spectatorship, and a mimetic or referential quality" (195). Hinz further suggests that auto/biography simulates drama's "visual immediacy or quality of actual presence" through "recourse to pictorial metaphors"—most notably, the use of the term "portrait" (196). More significantly for my purpose, Hinz also notes—although surprisingly only in terms of *biographical* texts—that photographs "constitute a major component" in many works of life writing, providing a sort of visual gallery whose pictures "dramatize" descriptions of people and places. Hinz then argues for the historical "sisterhood" of drama and auto/biography by giving examples of moments when the two arts come together, from the "earliest depiction of individual lives" in classical tragedy to the "epic or melodramatic nature" of the eighteenth-century novel, and on to twentieth-century works (196–97).

Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* is one of those contemporary works. Certainly the narrative contains the "conflict and dialogue" which Hinz suggests characterize the dramatic elements of auto/biographical texts. As the author searches for his father and his cultural roots, for instance, he continually encounters the vagaries and contradictions of collective memory when playing over historical "truth." Speaking of his family, Ondaatje notes that "No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in. In this way history is organized" (19). He dramatizes this observation in the sections entitled "Lunch Conversation," "Dialogues," and "Final Days: Father Tongue," which record the imprecise and various recollections of those members of Ondaatje's family who participated in those long-past events. What drives this process is the author's attempt to make sense of the memories shared of his father, which together compose a complex, contradictory picture of a man, a time, and a place, known intimately by everyone and no one. Faced with this uncertainty, Ondaatje resorts to gathering the strands: "There is so much to know and we can only guess. Guess around him. To know him from these stray actions I am told about by those who loved him" (171).

This narrative "I," engaged in a search for the father, provides the "mimetic or referential quality" which Hinz identifies as another dramatic

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

feature of auto/biography. Though *Running* opens with an untitled and italicized section which refers to the writer-protagonist as "he," in the rest of the text the "I" clearly meets the criteria of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact—the agreement with the reader that author, narrator, and protagonist are one. The name on the cover is of course Michael Ondaatje. In the section titled "Asia," the reader is told that the narrator "I" will be "travelling back to the family I had grown from" (16), a family identified as "Ondaatje" in the section "Jaffna Afternoons." So close are these correspondences that having resolved to "write" his relatives—"I wanted to touch them into words" (16)—in the later section "Monsoon Notebooks (iii)," he eventually records himself engaged in that act of writing—of trying to contain all the chaos (Monsoon) of the past within the order (Notebook) of the present: "Watch the hand move. Waiting for it to say something, to stumble casually on perception, the shape of an unknown thing" (162).

To recreate his familial and cultural past in Ceylon[4]—that "shape of an unknown thing"—Ondaatje must rely upon his own imaginative powers. His first goal will be to reanimate his own sense of his living family: "I realised I would be travelling back to the family I had grown from—those relations from my parents' generation who stood in my memory like frozen opera" (16). Reestablishing contact with these relatives is essential to his self-performance, for as Ondaatje states, "I grew up in a family that was pretty theatrical, where stories were essentially told verbally as opposed to being written" (Bush 239). Out of his reunions with these figures emerge one by one the characters who not only dominated his childhood, but who instilled in him the need for dramatic presentation in one's personal life. Principal among them are his parents, both "hams of a very superior sort" (*Running* 135). According to Ondaatje, it was his mother who "instilled theatre in all of us. She was determined that we would each be as good an actor as she was" (144). And although his father's "actions were minimal and more private" (143), he too possessed a "dramatic nature." Given these players, Ondaatje family life was often self-consciously theatrical, especially when his mother, seeking to "cure" her husband of "manic alcoholic consumption," engages in "theatrical wars" against him: "In his moments of darkness she drew on every play she had been in or had read and used it as a weapon, knowing that when my father sobered up this essentially shy man would be appalled to hear how my mother had over-reacted" (144–45).

For the most part, however, such scenes took place in private. Ondaatje's maternal grandmother Lalla was a far more public performer—so much so that Ondaatje's father, we are told, "couldn't stand his mother-in-law, Lalla, for what he saw as her crudeness" (143). From her first entry into the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


world, "born outdoors, abruptly, during a picnic," Lalla lived a life of "daily theatre" (97)—from her documented and much applauded retort to a judge while giving evidence in court ("'Who can say, My Lord My God, some people may find *you* good looking'"); to her open "ravaging" of "some of the best gardens in Colombo and Nuwara Eliya"; to her many escapades with her "false breast," worn after her "unnecessary" mastectomy (93–104); and culminating in her "last perfect journey" (104–108), a spectacular drowning performed with bravado and humor.

Small wonder then that Ondaatje refers to Lalla as the "centre of the world she moved through" (104). Yet paradoxically, self-reference in *Running* seems less individually centered and more communal. While James Olney has noted that autobiography "is also (or can be and often has been) the most rarefied and self-conscious of literary performances" (4), Michael Ondaatje instead creates a public, theatrical space for performing himself in ways that do not justify his sense of independence, but rather perform the rediscovery of his personal *inter*dependence within a specific familial and cultural community. This distinction will not be new to students of autobiography. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has described how the notion that "individualism figures as the very stuff of autobiography" (20) governs the work of such theorists as George Gusdorf, who stresses not only the autobiographer's "conscious awareness of the singularity of each life," but also his need to "oppose himself to all others," and even to feel "himself to exist outside of others" (29). As a result Gusdorf argues that autobiography is a "late product of a specific civilization," what Fox-Genovese clarifies as "modern bourgeois culture" (20). In more recent theorizations, this autonomous individual, whether seen as a humanist "absolute" with a pretextual existence, or as a postmodernist "product of the act of writing" (21), has been deconstructed in favor of being "grounded in ties of community—ties of class and race, of kinship and culture" (26).[5] Building on this claim, Evelyn J. Hinz argues that "perhaps the reason auto/biographical documents are so abundant in the Western tradition has to do with the extent to which they provide a sense of the communal that we lack" (208). Reestablishing the link between modern auto/biography and more "primitive societies" characterized by both ritual and communalism is therefore the next logical theoretical step.

* * * * *

Before exploring how Michael Ondaatje creates a communal selfhood in *Running* to compensate for that modern cultural "lack," I will briefly examine how long-standing dramatic and communal preoccupations shaped his

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

earlier work. Variously a poet, a critic, an editor, a novelist, a screenplay writer, and a film director, he cannot be narrowly categorized. The performative quality of his works, however, has been widely noted. Ondaatje himself claims that in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1970), he was "trying to make the movie I couldn't afford to shoot, in the form of a book" (Solecki, "An Interview (1975)" 20). *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976) documents the life of jazz musician Buddy Bolden, "whose famous cornet performances were never captured on records" (Jones 11). Both of these works were adapted for the stage: first performed in 1973, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* has had numerous productions, while *Coming Through Slaughter* reached the stage rather less successfully in 1980 (Mundwiler 14–19). During the same period, Ondaatje was directing films: *The Sons of Captain Poetry* (1970) documents the performance poetry of bp nichol and the Four Horsemen, while *Carry on Crime and Punishment* (1972) is performed by "family members and friends" (Finkle 173).

It is in *The Clinton Special* (1974), however, a film about Theatre Passe Muraille's "documentary-theatre project" *The Farm Show,* that we find that creative convergence of autobiographical thinking, dramatic form, and communal identity-seeking which will also appear in *Running.* Ondaatje's film records the theatre company's search for, and representation of, the spirit and history of the farming community of Clinton, Ontario. After living within the community for a period of time, the actors and director then "adapted stories, characters, anecdotes, and so on into a sequence of dramatic episodes" which were rehearsed and performed as *The Farm Show* (Testa 159). While discussing *The Clinton Special* in a 1974 interview with Sam Solecki, Ondaatje described how "drama," which he had consigned to the status of "dead art," had become vital for him: "I began to think of all the possibilities that were in the theatre; the whole of documentary drama, the possibilities of finding your own mythology in your own landscape" (15). As Derek Finkle has observed, this quest for "your own mythology in your own landscape" links Ondaatje's documentary with his family and personal memoir:

> The task the theatre company confronted in creating *The Farm Show* is much like the one Ondaatje faced in writing *Running in the Family.* The actors' ability to take everyday experiences and transform them into dramatic scenes that helped to define what [TPM director Paul] Thompson hoped would be a distinctly Canadian mythology parallels Ondaatje's ability to create a sense of myth out of the collected stories, rumours, and photographs of his family. In both play and book, the scenes, acted and written, envelop a sense of community, and, in doing so, progress without the benefit of a traditional plotline or narrative. (177)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


This "envelopment" of the "sense of community" contributed to the generic difficulties *Running* has famously posed readers. As Smaro Kamboureli notes, the book's "generic indeterminacy" is echoed "in the reviewers' and critics' attempts to define it vis-à-vis the specifications of certain genres" (79–80). Though most critics describe the text as an *auto*biographical work, many also insist on its biographical content, since the reader actually learns less about the author than about certain family members—most notably his father Mervyn Ondaatje and his maternal grandmother Lalla.[6] Such reactions have led other critics to call *Running* a "family chronicle" (Jewinski 112), or even "a brightly colored, animated family photograph album" (Sward 23). Timothy Dow Adams has argued that the theme of inheritance suggested by the book's title means that all of Ondaatje's biographical endeavors are necessarily autobiographical, for only by going back and rediscovering his familial and cultural origins can he come to understand himself better ("Running" 94). In this sense, biography is "an act of creation, including self-creation" (99). Some years before, in a discussion of "Generic and Other Slippages" in Ondaatje's text, Smaro Kamboureli argued that *Running* "is not, in fact cannot be, autobiography because the book's meaning is inscribed in the registers of its many genres which deconstruct the autobiographical privileging of self-referentiality" (81). I find it useful to think of *Running* as an example of memoir writing, that specific sub-genre of autobiography which "privileges" the referentiality of the individual's social and cultural community as the necessary ground for representing the *autos*.[7]

Several critics have identified context as the defining characteristic of memoir. As early as 1977, Marcus Billson notes that memoirs represent a self "being-in-the-world rather than becoming-in-the-world" (261). For Billson, the narrative "I" therefore proceeds on the assumption that "man's ontology derives from his historical context" (267). But Billson assumes that those segments of the memoirist's life "important to his identity as a social being" will be those of "extraordinary interest and importance"—"an exile, an imprisonment, the course of a career, participating in war, in politics, in an artistic coterie" (267, 261, 267). In this way, Billson relegates the person's more immediate context—the family—to the margins:

> the memorialist may mention his childhood, his parents, traditions of his social class, but these facts are treated tangentially—at most, in the spirit of detailing ingredients in a recipe. Never does the author integrate these influences as dynamic forces in the evolving process of psychic growth. (265–66)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Ondaatje's title counters this claim by suggesting that it is this personally specific context that provides the most important ground for self-identification. More recent theorists of the memoir have made this point repeatedly, often in relation to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975). Helen M. Buss argues that for "writers not usually part of establishment culture" ("Listening" 199), the memoir avoids the familiar stress upon the individual by "always maintaining a biographical and memorial concentration on the other to contextualize the self" ("Memoir" 205). Lee Quinby agrees, arguing that "by refusing the totalizing individual of the modern era," Kingston anticipated Foucault's call to "promote new forms of subjectivity" (424, qtd. in Quinby 297).[8]

In addition to reflecting the communal nature of his self-conception, Ondaatje's choice of the memoir form also draws support from the ritual function of life writing in "the modern era." Traditionally considered, "autobiography is equally a work of art and life, for no one writes such a book until he has lived out the requisite years" (Howarth 86). In opposition to this notion that autobiography records the self's progress over time to a state of miraculous wholeness, Elizabeth W. Bruss asks, "What power or principle can be invoked to determine the nature of autobiography's supreme task, or even to stipulate that there must be one and only one such task?" (2). In Ondaatje's case, any view that "the autobiographer must trace the teleology of his life" (Bruss 1) would prove virtually useless for the simple reason that the writer chose to publish an autobiographical text at the relatively early age of thirty-nine. Nor does *Running* conform to Billson's assertion that "the memoir as genre is closely associated with periods of crisis: both historical crises, such as wars and revolutions, and intellectual crises . . . such as periods of intellectual and spiritual transition" (280). What Billson has in mind here is the public life of such historical and political figures as Julius Caesar, Saint-Simon, and Winston Churchill—those for whom there is a need to "bestow upon posterity the insight and knowledge it never would otherwise have had without him" (268). Although "transition" and "crisis" are certainly terms applicable to *Running*, Hinz's comments on life writing as ritual act are, I believe, more useful. According to Hinz, for both the autobiographer and society, "the impetus for ritual act derives from a crisis situation or a sense of vulnerability (a feeling of diminished status/power)." Both also hold to a "belief that a return to origins is a means of recuperating lost vitality and stability" (207). For this reason, Hinz concludes that auto/biography is not "a uniquely modern

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


phenomenon," and further, that it is a "mistaken belief that primitive societies are totally without forms of auto/biographical expression" (207–208). For contemporary writers, then, auto/biography as practiced in the memoir form might well represent one of the few rituals still available in a secularized Western culture. In any case the resolution of self and origins in the ritual act of "auto/biographical expression" is clearly at the heart of Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*. Ondaatje's "crisis situation" is described in the section "Asia": "What began it all was the bright bone of a dream I could hardly hold onto. I was sleeping at a friend's house. I saw my father, exotic . . ." (15). The dreamer awakes "weeping," his "shoulders and face exhausted," feeling as though he is "in a jungle, hot, sweating," even though he is "sleeping at a friend's house" during the Canadian winter. As Winfried Siemerling suggests, such a moment "brings two worlds together that previously appeared isolated. For a moment, the image of the other appears as metaphor of an aspect of the self" (137). Or as Michel de Certeau would put it, this is a "propitious moment": an instant when the individual—the "consumer" or "user" for de Certeau, but for this paper, more properly the autobiographical or performative subject—makes the tactical decision, seizes the opportunity, to "combine heterogeneous elements" of himself (xix).

De Certeau goes on to claim that "the space of a tactic is the space of the other" (37). This is certainly the case for the dreamer in *Running*, suspended between his real physical placement and the nightmare of his father in Ceylon. At this moment, the West's demand for the "cultural affirmation of a normative 'self'" proves inadequate, as the dream contradicts a previous "evacuation of unruly heterogeneity within the individual" that the normative self requires (Smith, "Performativity" 19). The culturally assimilated, Torontonian adult academic/artist self apparently can no longer stay contained from the culturally marginalized, Ceylonese childhood self. The chaotic reappearance of the father, the chief representative of familial and cultural origins, destabilizes the author, robs him of his "comfort and order." *Running* "traverses," as Siemerling suggests, "the thetic boundary between 'the comfort and order' of the self's life and the space of the other associated with chaos and unreality" (138). Only a physical return can link these spaces. As Ondaatje explains, "I knew I was already running" (16).

In response to this dream, he plans his "journey back." It is not until two months later, however, when "dancing and laughing wildly" at his farewell party—an eerie reincarnation of his father's own drunken performances—that Ondaatje becomes fully aware of the psychological space

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

his physical journey will carry him across. No longer simply a dream image, the father and his accompanying chaos now inhabit the author's body, exhibited by his "growing wildness" while performing tricks "only possible when drunk and relaxed" (15–16). At this point, then, only in moments of extreme relaxation, such as sleeping and drinking, can Ondaatje apparently be aware of the shaping force of his familial and cultural past. Sidonie Smith suggests that this is how the unconscious functions, as a "repository of all the experiences and desires that cannot be identified with the symbolic realm and its laws of citationality, those calls to take up normative subject positions." The unconscious in short is "the repository of surplus, or excess, of unbidden and forbidden performativity" ("Performativity" 20). Evelyn J. Hinz elaborates on this notion by suggesting that, just as the "actor/actress assumes the role of another, so autobiography involves coming to terms with another self (either earlier or hitherto unrecognized). In both cases a sacrifice of ego is involved, and the degree of pleasure is in proportion to the amount of conflict" (200). For Ondaatje, this earlier emerging self is that of his father, and his memoir is an attempt to "communicate some of the fragments," some of the "unruly heterogeneity," within himself (*Running* 16).

Since Ondaatje decides to return to the origins of his own identity-making in response to the father, it should not be surprising that *King Lear* becomes a symbolic script for this psychological journey. In a section called "Blind Faith," Ondaatje uses the estrangement of Gloucester and his son Edgar as an emblem for his own separation from his father when his mother decided to leave Ceylon, almost thirty years before Ondaatje writes this memoir. "I long for the moment in the play where Edgar reveals himself to Gloucester and it never happens," Ondaatje writes, "Look I am the son who has grown up. I am the son you have made hazardous, who still loves you" (152). Unlike Edgar, Michael Ondaatje never revealed that later self he became to his father—"Always separate until he died, away from us. The north pole" (146). And yet, though Ondaatje's claim to his patrilineal inheritance of identity comes too late biographically, in the section "Thanikama," Mervyn Ondaatje is seen searching for a "lost" book—"not Shakespeare, not those plays of love he wept over too easily"—but rather the work written by his son:

> In the bathroom ants had attacked the novel thrown on the floor by the commode. A whole battalion was carrying one page away from its source, carrying the intimate print as if rolling a tablet away from him. He knelt down on the red tile, slowly, not wishing to disturb their work. It was page *189*. He had not got that far in the book yet but he surrendered it to them. (189)

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


is through literary performances like these that Ondaatje seeks to gain entry back to the world of his past, and thereby engender another self for the audience—his lost childhood self. Though he describes himself as "now part of an adult's ceremony" (152), at the beginning of *Running* he notes that "In my mid-thirties I realised I had slipped past a childhood I had ignored and not understood" (16). His desire to recover and reintegrate that lost childhood self into his "adult's ceremony" leads him to enact a form of ritualized reintegration of the self into its communal origins.

In *The Rites of Passage,* Arnold Van Gennep asserts that "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (2). Such transitions are marked by "ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (3). Viewed in this light, Ondaatje "slipped past" the transition from childhood to adulthood because, as he admits, the former had been "ignored and not understood"—or in Van Gennep's terms, not "well defined." In a 1995 interview, Ondaatje discusses this "dissociation" from his past (Coleman 62):

> Well I think when I left [Ceylon] at the age of eleven, in order to kind of live in England or go to school in England, I thought I had to forget my past, not out of a desire to forget it, but in order to cope with the present. And so . . . it wasn't until I went back to Sri Lanka at the age of something like thirty or thirty-five that I could kind of look at my past and understand myself, where I came from. (Dorfman)

This return conforms closely to Van Gennep's three-part "complete scheme of rites of passage": "preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)" (11). Ondaatje's "journey back" does not only initiate the process of separation "from one sociocultural state and status to another" (Turner, "Frame" 34), but as cultural performance theorist Victor Turner notes, this separation phase typically "changes the quality of time also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as 'out of time,' i.e., beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines" (*From Ritual* 24). Furthermore, separation "includes symbolic behaviour . . . which represents the detachment of the ritual subjects . . . from their previous social statuses." The wild dancing at the farewell party is such behavior, initiating the spatial and temporal changes from "antecedent mundane life" (Turner, "Liminality" 21). The intended return home perfectly accords with the relationship theorists of ritual have drawn "between spatial journeys and life-phase journeys." As Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry note, the journey ubiquitously

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

functions "as an analogue of growing up" (23). Ondaatje feels that he has "grown from" his childhood; his physical return is a necessary step toward "growing up." Sometimes this wish is explicit: "Look I am the son who has grown up," he dreams of telling his father (*Running* 152). At other times he captures this idea in an image: "I see my own straining body which stands shaped like a star," he dreams, "and realise gradually I am part of a human pyramid. Below me are other bodies that I am standing on and above me are several more, though I am quite near the top" (20). This image of interdependence illustrates perfectly what Victor Turner calls the "dimensions of human relatedness": "we are for, against, with, toward, above, below, within, outside, or without one another" ("Liminality" 19).

But before he can be reincorporated into his familial and cultural pyramid, Ondaatje must undergo that second liminal phase, the "betwixt-and-between condition often involving seclusion from the everyday scene." In this phase, "the subjects of ritual fall into a limbo between their past and present modes of daily existence" (Turner, "Frame" 34). In this state, the writer is displaced, marginal—"ambiguity reigns" (Turner, "Liminality" 23). As he makes his plans to return, Ondaatje knows that he "was running to Asia and everything would change" (*Running* 16). But the transition will require more. He must enter fully the chaotic, liminal world of his father, which he equates with the jungles of Ceylon (an entrance that begins, as we have seen, while still in Toronto—he wakes from dreaming about his father, feeling that he is "in a jungle, hot, sweating" (15)). When in Ceylon, Ondaatje imagines a physical/psychological engagement with the jungle in which "thorn trees in the garden send their hard roots underground towards the house climbing through windows so they can drink sweat off his body, steal the last of the saliva off his tongue" (11). Ondaatje's fear of the jungle's chaos informs his image of his father standing in the bathroom: "and nature advanced. Tea bush became jungle, branches put their arms into the windows. If you stood still you were invaded" (160). As the novice or initiate in this liminal jungle world, Ondaatje, as he seeks to rewrite the history of his family and of Ceylonese society, is "taught that [he] did not know what [he] thought [he] knew" (Turner, *From Ritual* 42). When asked in a 1990 interview, "Did you go back and re-create stories that you remembered, or were you discovering a whole other world that you hadn't known," Ondaatje answered "It was more a discovery" (Bush 239). I would suggest that it was even more an invasion, by a multiplicity of voices and versions of the past, which he gathers together into a collective production.

Particularly crucial to what could be called this self-invasion are Ondaatje's aunts, who collectively "knit the story together, each memory a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


old thread in the sarong" (*Running* 90). His "half deaf and blind" Aunt Dolly, for instance, helps him in his performance by embodying in herself memory (autobiography), the liminal nature of the jungle (ritual), and human relatedness (community). As she recalls an old family photo, Ondaatje suggests that

> it has moved tangible, palpable, into her brain, the way memory invades the present in those who are old, the way gardens invade houses here, the way her tiny body steps into mine as intimate as anything I have witnessed and I have to force myself to be gentle with this frailty in the midst of my embrace. (92)

In seeking to represent such permeable boundaries, Ondaatje resorts to a "multiplicity of media," striving "for a totality of information" (Pesch 111). And yet, his efforts are still creative, a fact which has led critics to label *Running* a "fictional memoir" (Adams, "Running" 99). In point of fact, though, invention is an important component of both ritual and the memoir genre. As Turner explains, the state of chaotic yet receptive liminality is "a phase peculiarly conducive to such 'ludic' invention," for it is in this state that "elements of novelty" are introduced into the "socially inherited deposit of ritual customs" (*From Ritual* 31–32). In "Jaffna Afternoons," Ondaatje describes the process this way: "we will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them all as if assembling the hull of a ship" (*Running* 19). This collective ordering through "swelling" is a Ceylonese cultural ritual. With reference to those family and friends thanked in his "Acknowledgements," Ondaatje remarks, "if those listed above disapprove of the fictional air I apologize and can only say that in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (176).

Similar claims have been made about the memoir. Marcus Billson notes that particular places, times, and characters in memoirs are evoked through skillful telling:

> Individual memoirs become literary works of art through the successful and pleasing deployment of various techniques customarily associated with artful narrative: characterization, dialogue, stream of consciousness, and landscape description. These contribute to the aesthetic appearance and impact of the memoir. (262)

As a result, "the memoir is ever the product, the synthesis of a confrontation between the experienced past and the imagination of the memorialist" (263). Theorists of autobiography see the literary genre as itself in transition,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by 2008 Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

as an earlier desire for "biographical facticity" (Smith, *Poetics* 4) has been replaced by the conviction that "lying" in such texts "is a highly strategic decision, especially on the part of literary autobiographers," largely because "narrative truth and personal myth are more telling than literal fidelity" (Adams, *Telling Lies* x). For some critics, Ondaatje does not entirely embrace this mediation between historical and imaginative re-creation. David Coleman writes that *Running* "closes in profound ambivalence, certain about the need to re-establish ties with the past, but uncertain about the possibility of meeting that need; certain about the inescapable influence of the father upon the life of the son, but uncertain about how to trace or interpret that influence" (73). But Ondaatje himself has said that when writing about historical figures, he "started to discover I was being more honest when I was inventing, more truthful when dreaming" (Wachtel 257).

The efficacy of Ondaatje's ritual journey is evident as he prepares to leave Sri Lanka/Ceylon, for the author can no longer be described as having "slipped past" the transition from child to man. As he writes in "Last Morning," he has literally reincorporated his childhood experiences, his familial and cultural past. "My body must remember everything," he insists, noting as he looks around him that "there is nothing in this view that could not be a hundred years old, that might not have been here when I left Ceylon at the age of eleven" (173). At such moments, the differences between his childhood and adulthood dissolve: "I stood like this in the long mornings of my childhood unable to bear the wait till full daylight" (174). Only now, the departing, reincorporated self is eager to begin, even if in half light, to write his memoir for an audience. Ondaatje's venture in writing *Running* thus aligns with ritual performance, for as Hinz suggests, "the type of mimesis that characterizes ritual" is neither "purely aesthetic exercise or 'realistic' reproduction" but a "combination of the re-presentational and pre-presentational." Ritual in short corresponds to the autobiographical axiom that "in the course of articulating the self one creates the self" (207). Ondaatje journeys back to (re-presents) his past self as a means to create (pre-present) a new heterogeneous self ready to undertake the ritual act of writing a memoir. This reincorporated self announces its presence in *Running*'s "Acknowledgements," which opens with the declaration that "a literary work is a communal act" (175).

This community includes the reader, for as Sidonie Smith explains, since audience expectations about the nature of subjectivity vary widely, the "performative subject" must respond accordingly:

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Maya Sahaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


> Everyday, in disparate venues, in response to sundry occasions, in front of precise audiences (even if an audience of one), people assemble, if only temporarily, a "life" to which they assign narrative coherence and meaning and through which they position themselves in historically specific identities. ("Performativity" 17)

Each performance, then, has an implied "community of people for whom certain discourses of identity and truth make sense" (19). Ondaatje takes two different audiences into account when publishing his text: the participants in his familial and cultural past, and a larger reading audience. *Running* therefore operates as ritual on two separate levels, for as Victor Turner explains, within ritual there are both *liminal* and *liminoid* phenomena. The former "predominate in tribal and early agrarian societies"; the latter, being "generated by and following the industrial revolution," include "the leisure genres of art, sport, pastimes, games, etc., practised by and for particular groups" (*From Ritual* 54–55). Though we cannot simply equate Sri Lanka with the liminal and Ondaatje's Western reading public with the liminoid, Turner's explanation of these two categories of ritual does seem applicable to Ondaatje's two different audience groups. Liminal phenomena have a "mass or collective character" with "symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all members of the group."[10] Ondaatje acknowledged the existence of this group through what amounted to a private performance of his text. In a 1984 interview with Sam Solecki, Ondaatje described how he sent copies of the manuscript to his brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins "to see whether it was 'right' or 'wrong'" (331). Asked if anyone was "disturbed" by his version of the past, Ondaatje answered "No. My brothers and sisters would have told me if they'd been annoyed by it. In that sense it was certainly a communal book and I was voicing the feelings we as a family felt" (331).[11]

By then publishing *Running,* Ondaatje performed himself in front of that much wider audience Turner associates with liminoid phenomena. These post-Industrial Revolution/post-Enlightenment rituals "tend to be more idiosyncratic, quirky." Even though they are "thought of at first as ludic offerings placed for sale on the 'free' market," thanks to their idiosyncrasies, "their symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the 'objective-social typological' pole" (*From Ritual* 54). Ondaatje himself has wondered out loud about the marketability of a text which is "about people you know really well and are close to but that the reader doesn't know at all—why would anyone be interested in the story of Mervyn Ondaatje, the story of my father?" (Solecki, "An Interview (1984)" 331). To become engaged in such performances, the reader is asked to adopt

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

what Turner calls the "'subjunctive' mood," the "'if I *were* you'" mood ("Liminality" 20), or what Hinz refers to as the "process of identification" which takes place in the spectator of drama and autobiography (206). But further, by entering into Ondaatje's "personal-psychological" performative act, the reader of *Running* becomes a part of the author's "journey back," a part of his questing after self-reflection and "growing up."

Now comprised of both Ondaatje's preexisting community of co-creators and his larger reading/identifying audience, the communal environment of the text becomes self-reflective in what might be called a ritual act of "metasocial performance," that "dominant mode of public liminality" through which "a group or community seeks to portray, understand, and then act on itself" (Turner, "Frame" 33–35). Metasocial performance, like the memoir genre, is developed "along the margins" of Western culture; it exists "in the interfaces and interstices of central and servicing institutions" (Turner, *From Ritual* 54),[12] so that, rather than serving as "ideological tools perpetuating the status quo," such performances encompass the "potential for subversion" (Woodbridge 21) of Western cultural norms. Turner lists dominant modes of metasocial performance in specific societies: "the simpler societies have ritual or sacred corroborees as their main metasocial performances; proto-feudal and feudal societies have carnival or festival; early modern societies have carnival and theater; and electronically advanced societies, film" (35). Such performances display a "plural reflexivity." They "stress the role of collective innovatory behaviour, of crowds generating new ways of framing and modelling the social reality which presses on them in their daily lives." Though it "attributes to individuals the authorship of its scenarios," stage drama is for Turner such a performance. Because a whole group of people besides the author directs and performs the play—"actors, audience, producers, stagehands"—stage dramas are "as much public as private performative modes" ("Frame" 46–47).

A similar "metasocial performance" of selfhood takes place in *Running*, for the single name appearing on the cover obscures the collective nature of the "I" within the pages. By enacting such a performance in his memoir, Ondaatje enlists the reader in "disassembling and interrogating the assumptions and impositions of humanism and history" (Snelling 21), including the "foundational myth of autobiographical storytelling as self-expressive of an autonomous individualism" (Smith, "Performativity" 31). As the author discovers while visiting St. Thomas' Church in Colombo, the name Ondaatje represents an inherited selfhood: "to kneel on the floors of a church built in 1650 and see your name chiseled in huge letters so that it stretches from your fingertips to your elbow in some strange way removes vanity,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

minates the personal. It makes your own story a lyric" (*Running* 55). Ondaatje's exploration of communal identity also deconstructs the need for continuity and purity" in Western historicism (Snelling 21). By providing personalized version of Ceylonese history which, as Turner suggests of rhizoid phenomena, is "plural, fragmentary, and experimental" (*From Ritual* 54), Ondaatje questions the West's "master historical narrative of progression," of "authority and universality" (Snelling 27, 21). One image which encapsulates this rejection of the purity of linear progression is the author's description of the region known as Nuwara Eliya "in the twenties and thirties": "Everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations. There was a large social gap between this circle and the Europeans and English who were never part of the Ceylonese community" (*Running* 32). There is no single universal version of Ceylonese history, and Ondaatje's memoir works to deny the authority of the "false maps," the "old portraits of Ceylon," drawn from the island's successive "seductions" of various European nations (53).

In this way, Ondaatje's representation of his personal, ritualized search for familial and cultural origins, for the "unruly heterogeneity" of his familial and cultural pyramid of interdependence, is an "outlaw" act (Kaplan 119) performed from the margins—or more precisely, from that "tear-shaped" island which historically acted as a "mirror" and only "pretended to reflect" (*Running* 54) Western "assumptions and impositions" of knowledge and power. Though "what began it all was the bright bone of a dream" experienced in private, readers of *Running* participate in the ritual performance of that dream which the author by himself can "hardly hold onto" (15).

## NOTES

1. Schechner suggests that the notion of "performance" is "a very inclusive notion of action; theatre is only one node on a continuum that reaches from ritualization in animal behaviour (including humans) through performances in everyday life—greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes and so on—to rites, ceremonies and performances: large-scale theatrical events" (1). I am proposing that life writing texts be placed on this continuum.
2. My understanding of "life writing" follows that of Marlene Kadar: "life writing is a way of looking at more or less autobiographical literature as long as we understand that 'autobiographical' is a loaded word, the 'real' accuracy of which cannot be proved and does not equate with either 'objective' or 'subjective' truth. Instead, it is best viewed as a continuum that spreads unevenly and in combined forms from the so-called least fictive to the most fictive" (10).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

3. "When I am referring to both autobiography and biography," Hinz explains, "I conjoin the two—i.e. auto/biography; when I am referring only to autobiography I omit the slash" (210). Although I prefer the term "life writing," when discussing Hinz's article, I will follow her usage.
4. Although Ceylon became the independent republic of Sri Lanka in 1972, Ondaatje makes clear his intention to "journey back" to the land as it was known in the time of his father, thereby invoking a peculiarly dramatic familial and cultural milieu.
5. For a detailed treatment of the theoretical discussions and history of ideas of the self in autobiography, see Sidonie Smith's *Poetics of Women's Autobiography.*
6. Whitney Balliett titled his review of *Running in the Family* "Lalla and Mervyn," and Josef Pesch questioned the generic nature of the text by subtitling his article "Michael Ondaatje's (Auto?)Biography." *Running in the Family* has also been categorized as "a kind of travel book" (Balliett 76), and a "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 305).
7. My thanks to fellow seminar member Janet Stucken for having pointed out that in the New Canadian Library 1993 edition, *Running in the Family* is listed under the heading of "memoir."
8. In a 1990 interview with Catherine Bush, Ondaatje refers to Hong Kingston's use of the memoir form and to Hong Kingston herself as one of a number of writers who helped him to build "a literary home" (239, 248).
9. The point here of course is that the page Mervyn gazes at is the page that the reader is currently reading (at least in the original McClelland and Stewart edition of the work in which the fictional and real pages are appropriately aligned), making the "lost book" clearly *Running in the Family.*
10. One particular "symbol" in *Running* which speaks to the ritual inheritance of Ceylonese society, and which would have a "common intellectual and emotional meaning," appears in the section called "Tongue": there is a "myth that if a child is given thalagoya tongue to eat he will become brilliantly articulate, will always speak beautifully, and in his speech be able to 'catch' and collect wonderful, humorous information" (61). Though supposedly nothing but a myth at this point, Ondaatje goes on to describe the very precise, ritualized manner in which the thalagoya must be eaten to be effective.
11. Though my concern here is with Ondaatje's intentions in distributing advance copies of the text, and his beliefs about the shared base of the book's meaning, in 1992 Christopher Ondaatje published his own text, *The Man-Eater of Punanai: A Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon,* which at the very least suggests the brothers shared a need to reclaim the past and its ghosts. For a critical exploration of the differences between the two texts, see Adams's "Running."
12. Memoir's "marginalized status" (Quinby 299) stems in part from its enjoinment of two such "central and servicing institutions": "the personalizing of history; the historicizing of the personal" (Hart 195). Billson notes that such interdisciplinarity makes memoir a suspect genre: "literary critics have faulted memoirs for being incomplete, superficial autobiographies; and, historiographers have criticized them for being inaccurate, overly personal histories" (259).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


## WORKS CITED


Adams, Timothy Dow. "Running in the Family: Photography and Autobiography in the Memoirs of Michael and Christopher Ondaatje." Dvorak. 93–99.

———. *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990.

Collett, Whitney. Rev. of *Running in the Family,* by Michael Ondaatje. *New Yorker* 28 Dec. 1982: 76–77.

Dickson, Marcus. "The Memoir: New Perspectives on a Forgotten Genre." *Genre* 10.2 (Summer 1977): 259–82.

Gilmore, Elizabeth W. *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Hutcheon, Catherine. "Michael Ondaatje: An Interview." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 238–49.

Kadar, Helen M. "Listening to the 'Ground Noise' of Canadian Women Settlers' Memoirs: A Maternal Intercourse of Discourses." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 60 (Winter 1996): 199–214.

———. "Memoir with an Attitude: One Reader Reads *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.*" *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 12.2 (Fall 1997): 203–224.

de Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Trans. Steven F. Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.

Coleman, Daniel. "Masculinity's Severed Self: Gender and Orientalism in *Out of Egypt* and *Running in the Family.*" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 18.2 (1993): 62–80.

Dorfman, Ariel. "Interview with Michael Ondaatje: Part 2." *Literati.* Bravo! New Style Arts Channel. Writ. and dir. Philippe Leclerc. 1995.

Dvorak, Marta, ed. *La Création biographique/Biographical Creation.* Rennes: PU de Rennes, 1997.

Finkle, Derek. "From Page to Screen: Michael Ondaatje as Filmmaker." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 167–85.

Foucault, Michel. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation.* Ed. Brian Wallis. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Fox-Genovese, Linda. "Between Individualism and Community: Autobiographies of Southern Women." *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography.* Ed. J. Bill Berry. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990. 20–38.

Gusdorf, George. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 28–48.

Hart, Francis Russell. "History Talking to Itself: Public Personality in Recent Memoir." *New Literary History* 11.1 (Autumn 1979): 193–210.

Hinz, Evelyn J. "Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography." *Essays in Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice.* Ed. Marlene Kadar. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992. 195–212.


CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Howarth, William L. "Some Principles of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 84–114.

Hutcheon, Linda. "*Running in the Family:* The Postmodernist Challenge." Solecki, *Spider Blues.* 301–314.

Jewinski, Ed. *Michael Ondaatje: Express Yourself Beautifully, a Biography.* Toronto: ECW, 1994.

Jones, Manina. "'So Many Varieties of Murder': Detection and Biography in *Coming Through Slaughter.*" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 11–26.

Kadar, Marlene. "Coming to Terms: Life Writing—from Genre to Critical Practice." *Essays in Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice.* Ed. Marlene Kadar. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992. 2–16.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "The Alphabet of the Self: Generic and Other Slippages in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family.*" *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature.* Ed. K. P. Stich. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1988. 79–91.

Kaplan, Caren. "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography.* Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. 115–38.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique.* Nouvelle édition augmentée. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996.

Mundwiler, Leslie. *Michael Ondaatje: Word, Image, Imagination.* Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984.

Olney, James. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 3–27.

Ondaatje, Christopher. *The Man-Eater of Punanai: A Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon.* Toronto: HarperCollins, 1992.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.* 1970. Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1994.

_____. *Coming Through Slaughter.* 1976. Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1993.

_____. *Running in the Family.* 1982. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993.

Pesch, Josef. "Mediating Memories: Michael Ondaatje's (Auto?)Biography *Running in the Family.*" Dvorak. 111–17.

Quinby, Lee. "The Subject of Memoirs: *The Woman Warrior*'s Technology of Ideographic Selfhood." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography.* Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. 297–320.

Schechner, Richard. *Essays on Performance Theory: 1970–1976.* New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear.* The Riverside Shakespeare. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974. 1249–1305.

Siemerling. Winfried. *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michael Ondaatje, and Nicole Brossard.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Smith, Sidonie. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 10.1 (Spring 1995): 17–33.

———. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Stelling, Sonia. "'A Human Pyramid': An (Un)Balancing Act of Ancestry and History in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family.*" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 32.1 (1997): 21–33.

Solecki, Sam. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje (1975)." Solecki, *Spider Blues.* 13–27.

———. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje (1984)." Solecki, *Spider Blues.* 321–32.

———, ed. *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Montreal: Vehicule, 1985.

Stoyard, Robert. Rev. of *Running in the Family,* by Michael Ondaatje. *Cross-Canada Writers' Quarterly* 5.1 (1983): 23–24.

Testa, Bart. "He Did Not Work Here for Long: Michael Ondaatje in the Cinema." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 154–66.

Turner, Victor. "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality." *Performance in Postmodern Culture.* Ed. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello. Madison: Coda, 1977. 33–55.

———. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982.

———. "Liminality and the Performative Genres." *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance.* Ed. John J. MacAloon. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984. 19–41.

Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage.* Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1960.

Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 250–61.

Woodbridge, Linda, and Edward Berry. Introduction. *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age.* Ed. Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992. 1–43.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# REVIEWS

David B. Pillemer. *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998. 256 pp. ISBN 0-674-58205-5, $35.00.

People often have vivid memories of momentous events, including traumatic war experiences, the deaths of public figures, marriage proposals, and graduation ceremonies. These seemingly diverse memories, which Pillemer terms personal event memories, have several features in common. Each memory corresponds to a specific moment or event, rather than a general event or a series of events; each contains many details of the rememberer's personal circumstances; and each is filled with sensory information that promotes a sense of reexperiencing the event. In his book, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories,* Pillemer, a Psychology professor and memory researcher, describes how we use vivid memories for significant events to learn from experience and form a meaningful life story.

Pillemer's concept of personal event memories includes several types of memories—including traumatic and "flashbulb" memories—traditionally studied separately by cognitive psychologists. Most people can remember specific details about where they were when they heard that President John F. Kennedy was shot, or when they heard that the Challenger shuttle had exploded. These "flashbulb memories" are rich in sensory detail. Similarly, survivors of terrifying traumatic events, such as the bombing of Hiroshima or Hurricane Andrew, may have detailed memories, sometimes called "flashbacks." Pillemer also includes "insight" memories to account for the detailed descriptions of epiphany that scientists, artists, and everyday people sometimes provide. Finally, included in Pillemer's analysis are memories for "critical incidents," defining moments in people's lives, such as arriving on a college campus for the first time.

The focus of the book—naturally occurring personal event memories—differs from the focus of memory research traditionally performed by cognitive psychologists. Unlike laboratory memory research that asks college students to memorize lists of words or numbers, Pillemer's work, while still primarily empirical in nature, is more concerned with the personal significance of emotionally-laden events than with the absolute accuracy or processing details of memory for the mundane.

By definition, personal event memories are important to people. Pillemer describes how such memories form a "skeleton" for people's autobiographies. His review of breakthrough research by developmental psychologists

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


documenting the development of children's ability to form autobiographical narratives is especially thorough and fascinating. As children learn to speak, they begin to develop a narrative about their lives. Through young childhood, children refine their life stories with the help of adults who teach children rules about how to remember important details and explain them to others. By adulthood, people have many personal event memories and sophisticated skills for sharing complex autobiographical stories.

Pillemer explains how personal event memories can dramatically affect human behavior. Previous memory researchers have suggested that people experience similar situations and, over time, develop scripts that help them plan how to act the next time they are in a similar situation. For example, after taking the bus several times, people develop an idea of how each subsequent trip will go. Pillemer points out that one-time events can guide behavior directly. He describes a college student who took a bus to a late-night event, only to discover that the return trip did not run at the time he wanted to leave the event. The result was a long walk home, and the student reported that he carefully checked the bus schedule after that one event.

This example is, in some ways, analogous to the ways a one-time traumatic event can influence future behavior. People who experience traumatic events often retain a detailed memory of the event and tend to avoid situations that bring up that memory. Even when trauma survivors have little or no accessible conscious narrative account of the traumatic event, their implicit memory may function so powerfully as to motivate dramatic changes in behavior. Unlike all other personal event memories, however, traumatic memories are often either so unavailable or so intrusive (or a disturbing combination of unavailable in part and intrusive in other parts—as when only a small part of a traumatic event is remembered over and over) as to be problematic for trauma survivors.

Pillemer provides many examples of traumatic memories in the book. Traumatic memories meet all of the criteria of personal event memories, and the connection between everyday and traumatic personal event memories is an important one. Traumatic memories are special in several respects, however, and at times we wished some of Pillemer's insights about personal event memories were more thoroughly examined with respect to traumatic memories in particular. For example, Pillemer introduces the concept that memories may trigger emotional states, as well as the other way around, as has been most often studied. This concept has profound implications both for mundane and traumatic memories. If the memory of a traumatic event has the power to affect emotions, then avoiding having the memory, not just avoiding the traumatic event from recurring, becomes the goal. For survivors of trauma, memories take on just this power. A cen-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

tral thesis of the book is that memories, not just events themselves, have an impact on people. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than for survivors of terrifying events. This discussion could have been improved by a more complete and explicit description of this process.

While some points could have been clearer, the book offers several insights especially relevant to traumatic memories. Pillemer discusses evidence for two memory systems: imagistic and narrative. Flashbacks seem to be essentially sensory memories that have not been stored in the usual, narrative way. Pillemer goes on to provide an important synopsis of the process of transferring sensory memories to narrative form. This discussion is enhanced by taking in the broader issue of constructing an autobiographical self, an important theme in the book.

Although the book does not thoroughly review the trauma memory literature, much of Pillemer's discussion is applicable to the central issues in this area. Pillemer specifically explains how talking about stressful events with others helps store memories as part of an ongoing narrative. Pillemer also reviews literature pointing to the important role adults have in guiding this process for children. This discussion is particularly relevant to betrayal trauma theory (see Freyd). According to this theory, memories of interpersonal trauma are less likely to be remembered continuously than are memories for traumas that do not involve betrayal. People who experience betrayal traumas, such as intrafamilial abuse, are unlikely to discuss their experience with other people, and children are especially unlikely to discuss their experience with caring adults. Pillemer's discussion of the importance of relationships with others in integrating memories into a narrative may be particularly valuable in understanding why survivors of betrayal traumas very often have amnesia for traumatic events as well as unintegrated imagistic flashbacks to the events.

Pillemer's book is remarkable in the comprehensive way the concept of personal event memories spans a great number of personally significant memories. The wide coverage is even more impressive in the context of insightful discussions on basic memory systems and child development. This book is an accessible and intriguing introduction to personally significant memories, presenting new and intriguing ideas about the role of autobiographical memory in people's lives.

*Kathryn A. Becker and Jennifer J. Freyd*

**WORKS CITED**

Freyd, J. J. *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Catherine M. Mooney, ed. *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999. 276 pp. ISBN 0-8122-1687-3, $19.95.

This collection of essays deals with an area of research—the cult of the saints during the medieval period—that has long attracted the attention of experts and scholars. As Caroline Walker Bynum notes in the Foreword that introduces the book, saints in general and hagiography in particular can now be said to constitute "a microcosm of the study of European history" (ix). In this connection, the essays gathered here have for their purpose an examination of the manner in which medieval hagiography contributes to our understanding of the role and function of gender as it influences the textual depiction of women and as it supports a specific world view and order. Whereas the experiences and voices of women have been studied extensively in recent years, little attention has been paid to the frequently diverging depictions of women as they are articulated or mediated by male writers. This collection endeavors to fill that gap by analyzing a number of texts on female holiness which alternatively were authored by women, dictated by them to a male admirer, written in collaboration between holy models and admirers, and authored by men. In texts that entail collaboration, the question is to discern women's and men's voices; and in the case of male-authored texts, to examine whether and how those alter the religious experiences of the women they purport to exalt. According to the the editor, Catherine M. Mooney, this collection of essays thus focuses "on female self-representations and male representations of female sanctity" in an attempt to assess, first, the "gendered" character of the resulting portrayals, and second, the extent to which such portrayals may be influenced "not so much by gender as by genre" (1, 2).

From Hildegard of Bingen, in the early twelfth century, to Dorothea of Montau, in the early fifteenth century, the eight saints considered in this collection differ from one another in terms of time and location, and the accounts associated with them are also marked by diversity and disparity, as they are comprised of "*vitae,* letters, personal revelations, inquisitorial records, theological commentaries, and personal prayers" (6–7). Nonetheless, these texts share a number of features which, taken together, point to the influence of genre in the resulting depiction of female sanctity. One crucial feature is the element of textualization that characterizes those hagiographic accounts, and a representative example of this can be found in the records of the visionary experience of Elisabeth of Schönau (d. 1164/65). Anne L. Clark's analysis of this corpus, "Holy Woman or Unworthy Vessel? The Representation of Elisabeth of Schönau," underscores the manner in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

which Ekbert, Elisabeth's brother and the transcriber of her visions, controlled the textualization of his sister's own description of her mystic experiences. Ekbert suppressed items when he felt it necessary, wrote introductions that emphasized what he considered significant about her visions, and reinscribed her experiences in a way that interpreted them "as primarily relevant to her own inner life" (39). In contrast with Elisabeth's self-representation as a messenger inspired by divine will and graced by visions of a universal value, her brother interpreted her experience "in light of the role of women" (42). In time, however, Ekbert came to agree with, and transcribed more faithfully, his sister's profound conviction that her prophetic role was intricately connected with her religious state and devotion. The resulting text therefore bespeaks the presence of a dynamic interaction between Ekbert and Elisabeth wherein he induced his sister's "interest in the constitution of her visions as a book" (44), while she shaped his textualization of her experience such that, more than a passive recipient of God's revelations, she became an active participant in them. As both "a record of divine revelations" and as "the portrayal of the life of a holy woman" (50), the resulting Schönau corpus marks the emergence of a new style of religious literature, one in which women became agents in their literary production, rather than the mere subject matter of those texts.

Another form of textualization is embellishment, as exemplified by the case of Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268). In "Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer," Amy Hollywood compares a surviving text authored by Beatrice against the text produced by her hagiographer. The latter work translates Beatrice's "internally felt experience into external, visible markings on the body of the saint" (81), and thereby emphasizes such penitential practices as her frequent prostrations at the feet of the Cross as well as the outward manifestations—like laughing and dancing—of her interior jubilation of mind. This account stands in striking contrast with the ambiguity of Beatrice's language regarding the embodiment of spiritual ecstasy, which she herself described in terms of a continuous "oscillation between interior and exterior, bodily and spiritual, material and imaginary" (95). Also noteworthy is Beatrice's rejection of the stereotypical "association of women with the body, and hence with bodily suffering," which is "so crucial to [her] hagiographer" (94). Because his account adheres to the prevailing ideology of the suffering female body, the hagiographer transforms Beatrice the visionary woman into "a vision, a divinely marked body, a spectacle for the viewing pleasures of her contemporaries" (91).

A third aspect of the process of textualization employed by male hagiographers in their interpretations of their holy models is editorial control.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


This aspect is frequently reflected in the threefold role of the transcriber as recorder of the saint's achievement, as her spiritual mentor, and as the authoritative figure who dictates her mode of conduct. An example of this can be found in the way Ekbert exalts Beatrice as the pure product of convent life, over and against Beatrice's expressed desire to escape from the rigid enclosures in which she lives (85). Another illustration is provided by Dorothea of Montau (1347–1394), who is bound to her confessor by a vow of obedience whereby she promises to act and speak according to his rules. One of those rules entails that she live in an enclosure such that he may supervise and observe her at will; and another, that he become the sole confessor to whom she will recite the sins of her past life. As Dyan Elliott's analysis demonstrates in "Authorizing a Life: The Collaboration of Dorothea of Montau and John Marienwerder," John becomes in this way "the uncontested purveyor of [her] visions and words" (173), empowering him to manipulate her confessions of sins past, and hence, her memory. Casting her in the role of the illiterate bride and himself in the role of the learned groom, John undertakes to write down her life story in a manner that is supposedly objective and impartial, but which in reality shows his tendency to exert censorship. Although "the authenticity of mystic discourse ultimately derives from its inexpressibility," in John's perspective the inadequacy of language lies not in the scribe so much as it does with the mystic herself (182). John's scribal role, which combines his capacity to transcribe Dorothea's ineffable experience and his expertise in translating her "(barbaric) vernacular into clerical Latin," thus invokes and reinforces "a hierarchy which affirms his superiority to Dorothea" (185). From John's standpoint, Dorothea's life obtains meaning only through his personal and scribal agency, for it is only after having known him (for a year and a half) that "Christ finally put words" in the mouth of this uneducated and heretofore inarticulate mystic (191). Christine of Stommeln (1242–1312) is similarly the object of a scribal reinscription, at the hands of Peter of Dacia, whose writing reflects a fascination for the mystical experience he attributes to her. In his analysis of Christine's own (putative) writings, "A Marriage and Its Observer: Christine of Stommeln, the Heavenly Bridegroom, and Friar Peter of Dacia," John Coakley shows that they depict a young woman primarily "struggling against demonic influences . . . and repeatedly winning the struggle" (115). This view is quite opposite to the admiring picture that Peter traces of her as Christ's sublime Bride. Yet the two portrayals are as complementary as they are opposite, in the sense that the interpreter creates the saint by exalting in her the extraordinary virtue that he considers himself to lack (117).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by 2000 Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

On the basis of this collection it thus appears that, if "there is no saint without an audience" (Bynum ix), there is also no saint without hagiography, and virtually no female saint without a male hagiographer. From the latter's perspective, those holy women were mystical and mysterious, hence the interpreter's tendency to transcribe the mystic's encounter with God in terms of a paranormal bodily experience. This summarizes the writings of Raymond of Capua as he endeavors to prove the holiness of Catherine of Siena (1347–1380). As Karen Scott observes in "Mystical Death, Bodily Death: Catherine of Siena and Raymond of Capua on the Mystic's Encounter with God," Raymond obliterates the lively, assertive, and socially oriented Catherine because, for him, she really is "a dead woman whose body was maintained in life by God in a supernatural way" (140). Raymond's text is that of an admirer fascinated by his protagonist's capacity to achieve union with God. In this sense, his text "tells a great deal about [him] and his milieu," about his own ideals and fears, "and very little about Catherine herself" (143). The same applies to Henry Suso's rendition of the life of Elsbeth Stagel (ca. 1300–ca. 1360), in that he constructs a portrayal that could describe any other holy mystic of the time. In Frank Tobin's view ("Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel: Was the *Vita* a Cooperative Effort?"), Suso's goal is to respond to the need of an audience lacking in spiritual sophistication, which would account for his effort at simplification at the cost of refinement (131). Yet it appears that Stagel left her imprint on his *Vita,* such that she can "rightly be called Suso's partner in its genesis" (134). Indeed, hidden beneath Suso's idealization of his holy model we can perceive elements characteristic of feminine spirituality, especially as they are illustrated by the personal and affective mode of relationship that she entertained with God.

When combined with the central nuptial imagery of the protagonist as bride of Christ, the mystical character of female sanctity (as viewed by these male writers) results in a portrayal that amplifies the passive aspect of their achievement. But the women themselves were not always without a strong personality. Witness Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), who wrote or dictated many of the events recounted in her *Vita.* The resulting text, which was compiled by Gottfried, Guibert of Bembloux, and Theodoric of Echternach, registers the presence of four distinctive voices: those of the three authors, and that of Hildegard herself who—as Barbara Newman points out in "Hildegard and Her Hagiographers: The Remaking of Female Sainthood"—was transformed from a timid recluse into "a commanding leader" and a prophet speaking for God (19). Her refashioning at the hands of Guibert establishes her as the Mother of mystics, an admirable woman

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


made so by virtue of her capacity to live piously in the religious version of the "private sphere" to which women of all stations were increasingly confined (33), rather than via her intellectual and artistic talent. Passivity is, indeed, the trademark of female sanctity as it is portrayed by male hagiographers, and these latter thus deserve the label of "interpreters" inasmuch as they articulate their own conception of the place and role of women in both terrestrial and celestial society. An emblem is Clare of Assisi (1194–1253). Whereas Clare adhered to a mode of imitation that focused on Christ himself, her hagiographer accentuated her achievement in becoming "the footprint of the Mother of God" (59), as Catherine Mooney demonstrates in "*Imitatio Christi* or *Imitatio Mariae?* Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters." This suggests a difficulty on the part of medieval men to think of women, "even an extraordinary woman such as Clare, as their spiritual equals in *Imitatio Christi*" (67). This would also explain the fact that raptures, visions, and other paramystical phenomena became "a major leitmotif of women's sanctity by the close of the medieval period" (14). At the same time, the transformation of the holy model into an exemplar of a passionate and ultimately unstable visionary discloses not a misogynist approach to female sanctity so much as the interpreters' mixed feelings in the face of women whom "they both admired and feared." Their textualization of those women's experiences thus bespeaks an attempt to "control and canalize" the danger they represent (15). In this sense, interpreting and reinscribing their achievements articulate a relationship grounded in respect, from scribes to models.

In sum, this is a collection that will prove useful to scholars and students alike in that it offers a nuanced assessment of the gender-based, genre-based, and also custom-based quality of the medieval hagiographic tradition. Indeed, the interpreters' alternate emphasis on virtues or on miracles, on internal spirituality or on mystical phenomena, may well reflect changing requirements in the ideologies that regulated access to canonization or cult.

*Brigitte Cazelles*

Jo-Ann Pilardi. *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography.* Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999. 155 pp. ISBN 0-313-30253-7, $49.95 (cloth); ISBN 0-275-96334-9, $15.95 (paper).

Simone de Beauvoir is the twentieth century author of five novels, one play, numerous volumes of autobiography and a wide variety of political and philosophical works. She is best known for the revolutionary sociopolitical

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

essay *Le Deuxième Sexe* [The Second Sex] which concerns the mythical and real relationships existing between men and women in society, and which laid the foundation for twentieth-century discourses concerning sexuality, gender relations, and feminism after 1949. In spite of these numerous accomplishments, it was commonly believed during her life, and for some time after her death in 1986, that Beauvoir imitated Jean-Paul Sartre in all of her writings and was not worth studying as a philosopher in her own right. During the last two decades, it has slowly become popular to challenge this assumption. Jo-Ann Pilardi's *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography* thus joins the ranks of others who, in reconstructing the intellectual relationship between Beauvoir and Sartre, demonstrate Beauvoir's importance as an independent thinker. Pilardi provides a wealth of information on the development of Beauvoir's notion of the self throughout the philosophical and fictional works published during her lifetime. Her study proposes first to isolate a Beauvoirian theory by examining the ways in which Beauvoir's philosophical essays agree and disagree with Sartrean existentialism. Then it plans on using this theory to identify the self crafted for her readers and herself.

Of appeal to those with little background in philosophy or in Beauvoir studies, as well as to a seasoned scholar, the introduction establishes the tradition in which Beauvoir wrote as existentialism (otherwise known as "existential philosophy"), and explains that this means that the self consists of an interaction between consciousness and its "by-product," the ego. Beauvoir's point of departure was thus Sartre's interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology, which establishes two types of being: "the intentional" and "the nonintentional," to use Pilardi's nomenclature. It was the intentional self, first discussed as a problem of existential phenomenology by Sartre, that Beauvoir developed into what Pilardi calls "the gendered self." Pilardi stresses that Beauvoir's gendered self is also clearly an intentional self: Beauvoir's conclusion to *The Second Sex* is that "woman was a transcendence forced to be an immanence by patriarchal society" (2). Pilardi also comments on Beauvoir's theory that such oppression could never be totally effective but would remain the central conflict of a women's life. To bridge the gap between European and Anglo-American audiences, Pilardi provides an overview of the differences between the Anglo-American and the Continental philosophical traditions. Anglo-Americans have a greater tendency to believe that the self has a specific unity and identity and to discuss that self in terms of epistemology and perception. Europeans, versed in existentialist philosophy, more often view the self as actions and choices grounded in intentionality.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Chapter 2 is perhaps one of the most fascinating chapters for those who debate Sartre's influence on Beauvoir and her originality in writing *The Second Sex*. Pilardi stresses that Beauvoir produced *The Second Sex* for what were initially private reasons: she wanted to write about her own life. This intent to talk about herself in detail apparently led her to scrutinize and describe the lives of other historical and fictional women and female figures. Beauvoir's philosophical analysis steeped in literary and real-life history differed greatly from Sartre's almost exclusively theoretical method in comparable works. To those who argue, for example, that Beauvoir imitates Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew,* published in 1946, Pilardi details the dramatic differences between the two studies. Sartre studies the mind, the personality of the oppressor, the anti-Semite. He remains on the speculative level. Although he mentions the importance of situation for the oppressed, the Jew, his analysis lacks concrete details. In contrast, Beauvoir provides almost one thousand pages of biological, psychological, historical, biographical, and anecdotal evidence concerning the situation of the cultural construction "woman." Beauvoir studies real women across the centuries.

According to Pilardi, Beauvoir also innovates in her use of the Hegelian master-slave or subject-object dialectic. Hegel's notion permits the subject and object status to move back and forth between individuals. Beauvoir showed that in male-female relationships, there is no movement. The patriarchy did not allow females the subject position, and as a result, they do not have the same consciousness as males. Thus Beauvoir modifies both the existential view of subjectivity and the Hegelian meaning of reciprocity. Woman cannot be a "freedom" or an "intentional." She is always relegated to absolute Other. She is culturally denied the choice to transcend herself. Even if she can overcome the external constraints, she will be conflicted internally because she cannot be feminine (passive, nonautonomous, always trying to please), as the world declares that she should, if she transcends successfully.

Turning to Beauvoir's autobiography in Chapter 3, Pilardi contends that the "self" Beauvoir created in *Mémoires* is not the existential self of consciousness, but is a "non-intentional" closer to the gendered self she created in *The Second Sex*. In so doing, Beauvoir showed the difficulty a woman has in getting control over her own life in order to make choices which thus create "the essence" defined by Sartre's "existence precedes essence" claim. Both linguistic strategies and plot elements contribute to Beauvoir's illustration. In *Mémoires,* the ironic distance that the narrator maintains from the protagonist shows that the Simone created no longer exists, and this defends the existentialist notion that the "self" is no-thing. Pilardi implies

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

that the ending to *Mémoires* puts into play both Beauvoir's gendered self and her existential self to make a point: death is the price a young girl must pay to win the freedom to be a more existential self. That more existential self becomes increasingly evident in a subsequent autobiographical volume, about midway through *The Prime of Life,* by the weakening of the irony in the narrator's voice. Thus Pilardi claims that in choosing to explore the notion of self through autobiography instead of philosophy, Beauvoir was able to address two challenges. She concretized the self in two roles: the self constrained by cultural definitions of gender and then freed by existentialism, and the self attempting to produce a woman-authored autobiographical work that explored philosophical questions and discovered meanings.

Chapter 5, "Writing the Self: The Woman in Love," analyzes the transformation that Beauvoir's autobiographical self undergoes when she is passionately in love. Pilardi's reconstruction of Beauvoir's relationships with Zaza (Elisabeth Lacoin), her best friend throughout her adolescence, and Sartre, her companion for almost 50 years, is detailed and innovative. As others have in past studies, Pilardi presents Zaza as Beauvoir's first main double and passionate love for whom Beauvoir even invokes a desired physical relationship. Yet Pilardi is the first to my knowledge to offer a detailed comparison of Beauvoir's autobiographical presentation of these two relationships, and to compare them (albeit too briefly) to relationships with other beloved beings including her sister Poupette (Hélène de Beauvoir), her cousin Jacques Champigneulles, her friend and lover Olga Kosakiewicz, and her lovers Nelson Algren and Claude Lanzmann. Certain readers will, however, be surprised to learn that Pilardi considers Zaza and Sartre as Beauvoir's only two truly passionate relationships. According to Pilardi, *Mémoires* teaches that existentialist and feminist survival requires the independence gained from making difficult choices. *The Prime of Life,* on the other hand, illustrates what happens when the independent feminist self gets caught up in cultural and genderized baggage. Pilardi shows a Beauvoir who writes herself more and more as a "'woman,' a being whose existence is relative to a man's" (100). In *The Prime of Life* Beauvoir acknowledges that she has been conditioned into femininity, and seems to recount her life to illustrate this fact. Increasingly in *The Prime of Life,* Beauvoir compares herself to Sartre, devalues herself, and causes her self to disappear by using "we" instead of "I" to describe her thoughts and activities. This use of the self as "we" opposes the existentialist notion of the self as a subject marked by individual choice, responsibility, and freedom. Thus the gendered self and the existential self remain locked in struggle. As Pilardi explains, by the end of *Force of Circumstance,* Beauvoir's passionate love for Sartre has

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


turned into more of an intellectual love, and this enabled her to reestablish herself as "the essential Subject."

Perhaps the richest section of the book, Chapter 6, "Writing the Self," argues that although Beauvoir sometimes stated that she wrote to preserve events," it is clear from the majority of her writings that her major goal was always to preserve her "self." In order to write well, however, she had to diminish first what Pilardi calls the "companionate self," the self that passionately loses itself in another being. Pilardi pinpoints Beauvoir's start as a writer as the moment when Beauvoir realized the threat that the trio Sartre-Olga-Beauvoir represented to Beauvoir's self. From that moment on, Beauvoir had something to say, and that something revolved around the notion of self and other. As Pilardi sees it, Beauvoir presents her "self" by its profiles, in keeping with the theory of the transcendental ego presented by Husserl and Sartre which states "the self is only a probable object and that which says 'I' is known only by profiles" (111). According to this transcendental ego theory, the self is thus grasped better and more easily from the outside by someone else, and that is why Beauvoir claims that "one can never know oneself but only narrate oneself" (119). For Pilardi, Beauvoir's entire autobiographical project illustrates three major points made in *Ethics of Ambiguity:* 1) freedom must be won; it is not a given, 2) it is in the adolescent stage that the "intentional" realizes that this freedom must be won, 3) freedom is always concretely realized (such as in the rejection of the bourgeoisie and in the act of writing) (112). *The Second Sex* could be viewed as a preface to Beauvoir's *Mémoires:* Beauvoir wrote it as a prelude to writing her own autobiography, and in writing her autobiography gives one example of the solution offered in *The Second Sex.* In order to assume freedom in an oppressive patriarchal society, a woman must act responsibly, and one way to do this is to write. Pilardi argues against Lejeune's claims that Beauvoir "simplistically believed in the past-in-itself" (the past-"non-intentional"), and against Kristeva's notion that Beauvoir "assumed her memoirs were directly referential to the truth" (115). Pilardi shows that in writing her "self" Beauvoir fully understands that she is creating characters and lending them her present consciousness until the autobiographical *Tout Compte Fait,* in which Beauvoir adopts a style and structure suggesting that her self was a fact to be learned. Pilardi muses that this move from existence back to essence may have been a way for Beauvoir to come to terms with death, but also shows that this fluctuation between presenting the autobiographical self as subject and object was an integral part of Beauvoir's philosophy. Pilardi states: "To a writer of autobiography from the existential-phenomenological tradition as Beauvoir was, the self presents itself not

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

simply as a life to be narrated, but also as an object to be known (phenomenology) and a freedom to be appreciated (existentialism)" (120).

Readers of Beauvoir's French texts and their English translations might be pleased by the comparisons and explanations Pilardi offers for certain terminology and texts. The word "self" for example is used much more often in English to compensate for the frequency of reflexive verbs in French. The notion of self is thus more ambiguous in French, more linked to activity than it appears in the English translation. Similarly, Beauvoir uses more active voice than is rendered in the regular English translations and philosophically loaded terms such as "profiles," which clearly evoke phenomenology for philosophers, are mistranslated as "outer edge." Certain literary allusions are also lost due to translation errors which help to disguise Beauvoir's consistent interest in defining the self.

As with any work on a great writer, there is also room for quarrel. Some Beauvoir scholars may regret that Pilardi did not choose to include Beauvoir's letters and diaries as autobiographical writings in her study. Others may be confused by occasional inconsistencies, such as Chapter 4, which contrary to earlier chapters, tends to conflate the narrator and the protagonist of *Mémoires* in its claim that Beauvoir questioned and rejected essentialism off and on after the age of three, and had begun to develop her philosophy about the interconnectedness of human freedom as early as 1929. Pilardi does not offer sufficient proof to support her assertion; the narrator of *Mémoires* remains an older, more distanced Beauvoir judging the younger one. Certain conclusions such as those concerning Sartre and Zaza in relationship to Beauvoir will surely bear consideration in light of Beauvoir's 1926–1930 diaries, which will soon be published for the first time.

Overall, however, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self* stands out as a worthy text which could easily be used in a philosophy or literature course presenting *The Second Sex*. It is a very understandable and valuable addition to current Beauvoirian scholarship.

*Barbara Klaw*

Martha Watson. *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists.* Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1999. 149 pp. ISBN 1-57003-200-9, $24.95.

### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL APPROPRIATIONS AND ARTIFACTS

*Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists* is a powerful example of the distinctive rhetorical challenges faced

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


by five female activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Watson effectively illustrates how Frances Willard, Anna Howard Shaw, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Mary Church Terrell appropriated dominant discourses of femininity in order to establish acceptable public personas, and how Emma Goldman's unconventionality contributed to readers' lack of interest in the subject of her autobiography—her conversion to anarchism.

Watson's primary stance is that of a rhetorician. *Lives of Their Own* is a persuasive work of rhetorical criticism that presents the autobiographies of five activists as forms of public discourse shaped by particular historical moments and rhetorical situations. Drawing on the work of Janet Varner Gunn, among other scholars, Watson views autobiography as a cultural act of reading and writing the self. She thus gives explicit attention to the social and rhetorical contexts from which autobiographical texts emerge and into which they circulate. One might argue Watson approaches early women activists' self-representations as autobiographical artifacts. Artifacts may appear stable and fixed, as objects or relics which offer a trace of some past, but as any archaeologist or archivist will tell you, environmental conditions and interpretive frames alter the artifact as well as our perception of it. When the term artifact is combined with the term autobiography, the artistic and historical dimensions of the process of composing a life and marking its value are thrown into relief.

Watson effectively highlights how rhetoric shapes the autobiographical self and how material circumstances constrain rhetorical choices. *Lives of Their Own* can be situated within the emergent tradition of feminist rhetorical criticism and archival work in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies, such as Anne Gere's *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs,* and Susan Miller's *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing.* Watson acknowledges the influence of feminist autobiographical theory and rhetorical criticism on her project; however, she does not foreground the significance of rhetorical criticism for feminist studies, how it can help us understand better feminism's historical failures and successes, and imagine its renewal. Perhaps if Watson had broadened the theoretical and historical scope of her framing chapters, *Lives of Their Own* could have set the stage for the much needed revisitation of the stories we tell about the history of feminism in the United States. For example, Watson's perceptive analysis of how early women activists constructed authority through the strategic appropriation of traditional gender ideologies and rhetoric has profound implications for how we understand agency within the context of the women's movement. Indeed, the rhetorical negotiations and appropriations that Watson highlights suggest

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

that women's agency does not exist in some wild zone outside of culture and its discourses, but that agency emerges from the fissures of dominant discourses and in spite of them. Watson importantly brings rhetorical criticism to the foreground of autobiographical studies in ways that begin to challenge idealized notions of personal and political agency.

Chapter 1, "Autobiographies as Persuasion," provides a useful overview of autobiographical scholarship for readers unfamiliar with the field, highlighting the links between autobiography as a phenomenon and its production in Western culture. In contrast to early autobiography scholars, Watson attends to "the impact of social mores and practices on the form, substance, and style that one adopts in writing a life story" (19). She aligns herself with the influential scholar Estelle Jelinek, who in *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (1986) illustrated the stylistic differences between men's and women's autobiographies. While Jelinek does not foreground the rhetorical significance of women's autobiography, Watson shares Jelinek's interest in how women "negotiated the treacherous waters of what constituted acceptable and even admirable female behavior" (21), and thereby further illustrates how stylistic differences are a product of material circumstances. Watson provides ample historical and biographical background to understand the rhetorical choices these women made; however, her concern is not with factuality but with how women activists rhetorically negotiated the social and historical terrain.

Emma Goldman's autobiography *Living my Life,* a story about her conversion to anarchism, is a case in point. In her analysis of why Goldman's work failed to persuade readers at the time of its publication, Watson highlights the "limitations of the genre of autobiography as a tool for ideological persuasion" (38). Watson argues that the book failed, in part, because of Goldman's "unrestrained personal behavior," her critique of marriage, and the fact that she did not probe the ideologies of anarchist leaders, or offer sufficient explanation of her own ideological orientation (35–42). The book's inability to attract interest lies in its explicit challenge to conventions at the time; most middle-class readers were simply not able to look at Goldman as a role model. Even reviewers dismissed *Living a Life* as the "'love life of an Anarchist'" (37). In contrast, audiences were attracted to Shaw's and Cady Stanton's autobiographies because these writers depicted themselves as "womanly" leaders (44). Watson argues that most women did not have the "convenient physical condition" that allowed Goldman her sexual freedom. Women did not have safe birth control options at that time. But we never learn exactly what is meant by Watson's description of Goldman's "convenient physical condition." Watson mentions that Goldman's

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


husband was impotent. Yet the phrase "convenient physical condition" ascribed to Goldman also suggests that she was unable to have children. If that was the case, wouldn't the social stigma of not being able to bear a child, then, also have played a factor in the public's perception?

Chapter 2, written by James Kimble, a Ph.D. candidate who worked with Watson, focuses on Frances Willard, whose reform interests included a leadership position in The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and commitment to the suffrage movement. Willard's autobiography *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* was published in 1889 and sold well. Like Cady Stanton and Shaw, Willard cloaked her assertive leadership style with a conservative rhetoric of Christian ideology and "true womanhood," which in the nineteenth century referred to feminine ideals of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness (111). Willard rhetorically positions herself as a moral agent—as "God's own agent"—who doesn't meddle in politics but obediently practices God's will and does so while maintaining her femininity (61). As Kimble puts it, "she used her story to frame herself as hesitant and self-effacing," and rhetorically situated "her political goals within the context of home protection" (50–51). Willard assured readers that she was inspirited by feminine concerns in order to make her political aspirations and views more palatable and to garner approval as she entered the primarily male terrain of public autobiography and political life. Kimble provides convincing examples of how Willard appropriated dominant constructs of femininity in her autobiography; however, he does not offer a sustained analysis of the larger historical and political consequences of such appropriations. For example, further analysis of the conflicts between Willard and Ida Wells Barnett, and others who challenged Willard, may have facilitated a discussion of the limitations of certain rhetorical moves and gender essentialism in the predominately white women's movement.

Watson compares the autobiographies of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Anna Howard Shaw in the next chapter, giving readers insight into their activities in the suffrage movement. Cady Stanton and Shaw express their commitment to the cause of women's suffrage, and trace their development and gradual awareness of the issues facing women. In Cady Stanton's *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815–1897,* we learn about the weight of domestic responsibilities, social isolation, and the challenges of middle-class domestic life as a mother. Shaw, a child of English immigrants, did not marry, but she did express a desire to have children, and regret at not having adopted a neglected child who she cared for briefly. Despite the fact that Shaw's parents could not financially support her pursuit of education,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

like Cady Stanton, she experienced much academic success. In *The Story of a Pioneer,* she conveys strength and perseverance, yet manages to maintain an image of herself as a "womanly" woman (73). As Watson points out, the balance that each woman attained in depicting herself as a "feminine" activist appealed to their largely middle-class and relatively conservative audiences (77). Watson, a fairly sympathetic reader, argues that Cady Stanton's and Shaw's rhetorical choices and depiction of the "new woman" represent "an expedient and successful ploy for the early woman's movement" (77). Their rhetorical personas and invocation of traditional ideologies of womanhood may have appealed to middle-class audiences; however, these works presumed a social class mobility to which many women did not or could not aspire.

Modesty, humility, balance, control, and moderation are just some of the qualities that rendered the autobiographies and public lives of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women activists acceptable as role models "negotiat[ing] the tensions between feminine decorum and social activism" (98). Some of the same rhetorical qualities characterize Mary Church Terrell's autobiography *A Colored Woman in a White World.* Church Terrell was the first president of the National Association of Colored Women and an organizer and activist who worked to end segregation. The two characteristics that Watson foregrounds in her analysis of Church Terrell's rhetorical persona are her didacticism and her lack of bitterness. That Watson characterizes Church Terrell's lessons about racism in America as "didactic," and the lessons learned from the struggles of the white activists under study as "persuasive" is curious, if not troublesome. Nevertheless, Watson's perceptive analysis of Church Terrell's primary focus on individual and attitudinal causes of racism in *A Colored Woman in a White World* sheds enormous light on why white middle-class readers continued to read Church Terrell and why reviews were positive. Her work appealed to white audiences precisely because it did not threaten them or hold "the whole White race as responsible for the injuries she endured" (86).

Individualism pervades each of the activist autobiographies under study; each writer-activist depicted her individual struggles and successes and the circumstances that motivated her to act. Readers then and now may admire these women's persistence, strength of character, and ability to balance family life and social activism—precursors, as Watson puts it, of the "modern women" (111). However, as critics we must consider not only how these works reflect rhetorical constraints at the time, but how they depict and forecast gender and racial tensions within the women's movement, as well as how they contributed to contemporary myths, such as the superwoman.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Finally, *Lives of Their Own* asks readers to consider how rhetorical criticism may help unearth the artifacts of individual lives and ideologies of gender, social class, and white privilege.

*Wendy S. Hesford*

Barbara Green. *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938.* New York: St. Martin's, 1997. 232 pp. ISBN 0-312-17267-2, $45.00.

The *Spectacular Confessions* of Barbara Green's title comprise a varied lot of autobiographies and less formal first-person writings generated by Britain's suffrage activists, both during their movement's militant and spectacular era between 1905 and 1914, and later, looking back on those years. Whether a novel or a private letter, the texts of interest to Green offer images of protest created within the context of women's campaigns to gain the vote, and they rely, she insists, on the persuasive force of the female body when thrust into the public sphere. As political gestures, these writings infused public debate about women's status with language and imagery derived from the personal experience of resistance—or in Green's construction, they "were intended to make the feminist body visible" (5). Political or collective by intention, the "spectacular confessions" are less interesting to Green as windows on individuals, than as tools in the formation of a social movement (17).

Green admits to a contemporary purpose (or two) in her consideration of this body of literature about suffragists' pageants, hunger strikes, violence, and martyrdom. First (in my own order), she wants to rescue British militants from critics of their day, and ours, who understood the suffragists to be trapped in the apolitical binds of modernism. If they mimicked the new culture of advertising with their repetitious accounts of the horrors of forced feeding, for example, Green argues that they also transformed it by making that culture a tool of resistance and a basis for collectivity. Thus, in their engagement with the dominant discourses of modernity, in their blending of critique and performance, they created, according to Green, a new political language and form. Second, Green wants this reimagined political and literary moment in history to provide a useful model for today's feminists. Here the chief lesson she draws is the advantage, demonstrated by militant suffragists themselves, to be gained by blending practice and theory (a point to which I'll return).

The core of this slim volume consists of three roughly chronological chapters that map the changing political needs and spectacular responses of the militants as their conflict with authority intensified. In a consideration

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection. Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

of the movement's pageants, through which suffragists arrayed themselves in public processions, Green reads Constance Lytton and Elizabeth Robins as theorists of problems in spectatorship and privilege. Their own pageantry raised for them questions of class and exclusivity. Green's chapter on the years of incarceration and forced feeding pits Teresa Billington-Greig, a critic of the militants, against a number of narratives by prisoners to reach the conclusion that suffragists exposed the culture of oppression and overcame their isolation through the retelling, or the reproduction, of their experience, and thus subverted the passivity of advertising. In the third of these chapters, Green examines the last period of militancy, when invisibility was imposed on activists threatened with re-arrest. Here she reads Mary Richardson and Gertrude Colmore to open up a new, muted politics of the spectacle, defined by sickrooms, sentimentality, and domesticity. According to Green, militants took these familiar sites of femininity and infused them with oppositional meanings that helped to sustain a virtual collectivity.

Less convincing as a part of the same argument are two further chapters, one about archives, or the construction of a history about women's spectacular politics, centered on Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, and a final one about Djuna Barnes and her journalistic take on the propaganda of forced feeding. Although curious and challenging readings of the texts, these two chapters give *Spectacular Confessions* the feel of a collection of essays rather than a cohesive work. What begins as a strong and useful randomness about the texts under consideration, one that ignores genres and rigid definitions of literature, is here made haphazard. Any old evidence that modernism and suffragism crossed paths might have done as well.

Green establishes that this intersection occurred, and it is usefully explored. She makes a good case, for example, that the British authorities did not succeed in squashing performance activism by jailing the militants or driving them underground. Rather, the militants uncovered new ways to create a feminist collective still capable of resistance and opposition through the written word. But in making her case, Green is maddeningly silent on the political aims of her subjects and the historical specificity of their contest. She never bridges the chasm that divides "feminist bodies and narratives of embodiment" from political disability in the constitutional monarchy of Edwardian England (141). Consequently she never asks if the new political language and forms she identifies had anything at all to do with winning the vote. The fundamental historical questions about a political phenomenon are ignored, or worse, swept aside. After introducing readers to the condemnation of feminist spectacle voiced by suffragist Teresa Billington-Greig—that is, to the criticism that militants blinded feminists

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


with hero-worship, sapped them of their independence, and mass produced victims of patriarchy—Green erases this moment of political debate by showing" that Billington-Greig simply misunderstood modernism.

Finally, it must be said, this book is unreadable to all but a small coterie of literary scholars, who will, presumably, count it henceforth among their essential theoretical cross-references. Barbara Green might well heed her own (ironic?) warning that activist politics is weakened by "locat[ing] 'practice' outside the walls of the academy and 'theory' inside those walls" (27). Works accessible only to readers located in an academic annex will leave no mark at all.

*Ann D. Gordon*

Amanda Vickery. *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. 294 pp. ISBN 0-300-07531-6, $40.00.

Amanda Vickery's thoroughly researched book on the lives of Georgian women in England focuses on members of the gentry residing in the north of England. Her definition of gentry is wider than that used by other social historians. She includes not only those with incomes of at least £100 derived from land, but also those in the "genteel trades" that required some capital (for example, bankers, manufacturers, merchants). She concludes that, contrary to much established opinion, women did not necessarily have "declining options" as the eighteenth century progressed. As she sees it, Georgian women never lamented a lost "golden age of prestigious, highly profitable and wide-ranging female work" (5), but they also did not live so exclusively in the domestic sphere as many historians have argued. The genteel women whose letters and diaries Vickery examines interacted extensively with kinfolk, tradesmen, landowners, and even the aristocracy. They lived multiple roles, not one—daughter, wife, mother, consumer, manager, hostess—and revealed through their writing "the possibilities of lives lived within the bounds of propriety" (12).

Vickery draws on material in the Lancashire Record Office at Preston, and to avoid the danger of limiting focus and drawing class lines too rigidly, she examines all material in the archive written by privileged women between 1730 and 1825, supplementing her research by looking at similar material in other northern and in London archives. In some ways, the sheer volume of material introduced into the book is overwhelming, but Vickery makes a very convincing case about the actual role of these women in provincial Georgian society.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

The experience of Elizabeth Shackleton (1725–81) dominates the study largely because Vickery had access to thousands of letters and thirty-nine diaries that chronicle nearly twenty years of her life. Born into a family that hybridized the gentry and the textile trade, she married Robert Parker, a genteel second cousin, and was widowed at 32. Seven years later, she eloped to Gretna Green with John Shackleton, a wool merchant eighteen years younger than she. From her letters, a picture of Georgian life emerges. We learn who is on visiting terms with the family and who is not, with the line being drawn, not between the "landed" and those in "trade," but rather between those in the professional/commercial classes and the retailers and shopkeepers below them.

Her two courtships also serve as a corrective to ideas that we may have garnered from reading novels. Robert Parker spent years melodramatically courting Elizabeth, against her family's approval. Many of his letters seem modeled on those in fiction: he pleads for clandestine meetings, he threatens her with a rival, and he pours out his heart. She, on the other hand, is clearly torn between her heart and her duty, but she nonetheless sides with duty. She wants Robert, but she feels uneasy about offending her father, who thinks Robert beneath her. Her letters reveal circumspection and caution. Eventually, after seven years, all sorts itself out, the marriage settlements are drawn up, and they marry. Her next marriage proves less felicitous: Elizabeth never gains the approval of her family this time, but she marries her young man just the same. After about seven years of marriage, her second husband takes to drink and abuse. Since her family cast her off when she eloped, she has no support system and must endure her husband until her own death releases her.

Vickery examines the progress of several marriages as revealed in letters, concluding that the best ones shared a division of roles mutually agreed upon by both husband and wife. Also, the wives saw themselves as dutiful, and even prided themselves on being dutiful as long as their husbands, whose patriarchal authority both took for granted, did not push the limits. A successful marriage was very much a "shared endeavour" (72), but also depended on a husband's good will and family support. A woman had to strike a balance between emotional satisfaction and pragmatic concerns when choosing a husband.

The book devotes entire chapters to topics that loom large in the letters of married women. We learn first-hand about the complexity behind debates and fashions involving the suckling and weaning of infants, for instance, and gain insight into the handling of childhood illnesses. Vickery's conclusion is that, despite the high infant mortality rate, there is no shortage

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


parental affection in the eighteenth century, but it is tempered with gritty emotional endurance" (121) and "stoic fortitude" (125).

The letters also reveal that these women saw the managing of a large ouse as a status-enhancing occupation, and their memorandum books pre- ve for us the "nuts and bolts of genteel housekeeping" (133). Elizabeth hackleton provides a wealth of information about the hiring and managing servants in the provinces. She, like many of the women studied, expect- servants to be beholden to the mistress, and regarded their infractions as arks of ingratitude. With constant turnover in the staff, the mistress of the ouse was very much responsible for the smooth running of life in it. The emoranda give us details on how Shackleton purchased commodities, m furniture and china to the latest fashions in dress, and Vickery analyzes w she "ascribed meanings" (188) to those objects, which served as "props" social "rituals" of status (190). Even Shackleton's manner of entertain- visitors can be interpreted as a mark of her civility and status. Vickery's al chapter focuses on "proper" public activities for genteel women: danc- at assembly rooms, belonging to libraries, reading the London newspa- rs, and involving themselves in philanthropic organizations.

Vickery concludes that the life of the genteel eighteenth-century woman id not become more circumscribed as the century slouched toward the ictorian era. In contrast, the Georgian lady became "increasingly adept at anipulating [the language of domesticity] to pursue a range of activities nd assume a set of responsibilities outside the home" (293–94). Readers of his controversial and well-argued book will find much detail about every- ay life in the provinces, an excellent index, and dozens of informative con- mporary engravings.

*Linda V. Troost*

Barbara Frey Waxman. *To Live at the Center of the Moment: Literary Autobiographies of Aging.* Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997. 185 pp. ISBN 0-8139-1757-3, $36.50.

"It is my contention," writes Barbara Frey Waxman, in the introduction to *To Live at the Center of the Moment: Literary Autobiographies of Aging,* "that autobiographies of aging and literary criticism's readings of these autobiographies can transform our fear of aging and our wariness of elders" (2). Waxman's earlier *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (1992) considers representations of aging in the novel. In this new study she discusses autobiographical writing—including journals, memoirs, and diaries—written both by middle-aged

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


writers testing the waters of late life, and by mature writers navigating from the vantage point of their sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties. In particular, Waxman contemplates what she calls "literary autobiographies," texts in which established writers render the experience of aging. She assumes such autobiographies will capitalize upon the resources of literariness, including improvisations with forms of life writing, "literary themes and other uses of language," and techniques such as character description, flashes forward and back, "the interweaving of dialogic voices," and the "unique imbrications of imagery about the aging body, mind, and soul that reinvent our ways of perceiving elders" (14).

Waxman grounds her approach to autobiographies of aging upon several theoretical perspectives. She builds her hope that these autobiographies will expose the stereotypes of aging that undergird ageism on reader-response theories which argue that powerful texts have the power to transform their readers. Analyses of the dynamics of oppression—from the perspectives of feminists, race theorists, sociologists, and cultural historians of aging—inform Waxman's understanding of ageism. The writers she discusses challenge this form of oppression with tales of their own lives and those of older friends, family members, and mentors. Kathleen Woodward's compelling psychoanalytic analysis of the social and psychic construction of aging (argued in many articles as well as her own book) guides Waxman's search for writers' unfolding sense of an aging self. Most ingeniously, Waxman invokes Mikhail Bahktin's concept of heteroglossia—the many and sometimes competing "voices" that Bahktin perceives as a defining constituent of fiction—to illuminate the multi-vocal quality of these autobiographies. Here, attending to the texts' heteroglossia enables readers to eavesdrop on the tensions and accommodations required by the often overlooked differences marking late life: intergenerational struggles; the distinctions sociologists mark as young-old, old, old-old, and oldest-old; discord among members of a single generation; tensions prompted when those of the same age do not share gender, color, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, or the same degree of health or memory; and internalized conflicts about aging within any given individual.

Following the introduction, the book is divided into four chapters. Each chapter elaborates recurring themes in autobiographies of aging by juxtaposing two or more texts. Chapter 1, "Elderly Parents Seen through Middle-Aged Children's Eyes," compares two "biographies" which melt into autobiography as each writer describes a parent's struggle with a devastating disease. Madeleine L'Engle's *The Summer of the Great-Grandmother* (1974) recounts the year in which she cared for her mother through the last

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


ges of Alzheimer's Disease. Philip Roth's *Patrimony* (1991) is a son's ibute to his father, who fights to live richly through the terminal stages of ncer. Waxman shows how each "biography" becomes an autobiography ich details the adult child's fears of aging and loss when the conventional haviors of parent and child give way to the necessities of care-taking. In rticular, these authors generate narratives from childhood which keep the dlife parent alive in memory even as the writer mourns the elderly par-'s frailty.

In powerful contrast, the voices of older people themselves resounding-emerge in the next chapter, "The Passage to Seventy." The book's title is ken from May Sarton's *After the Stroke* (1988), "'I do not want to relive e past. . . . I want to live in the instant, the very center of the moment'" qtd. in Waxman 6), and Waxman turns to Sarton's *At Seventy* (1984) and oris Grumbach's *Coming into the End Zone* (1993) to locate and elucidate at moment. This chapter is perhaps the most resourceful in its character-ation of late life. Along with more predictable accounts of mutually sus-ining relationships between elderly parents and their children, Waxman o shows how Sarton and Grumbach vigorously pursue pleasure in the ange and the challenge afforded by new friendships, new activities, and e love of lesbian partners. Perhaps most reassurringly to academic read-s, the chapter examines Sarton's and Grumbach's deep, abiding commit-ent to a life of writing.

In order to suggest how thoroughly one's sense of aging is infused with her aspects of identity, Waxman focuses on autobiographical texts by riters of color in Chapter 3, "Women Warriors against Racism and Age-m." The chapter opens with a quick look at *The Autobiography of W. E. B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (1968) and Du Bois's *In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday* (1952) to acknowledge that for African American writers race has een such a profound, overwhelming issue that in autobiographies and iographies, old age is often treated as incidental rather than central. The hapter then turns to Lucille Clifton's *Generations: A Good Woman* (1987), udre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980), Maya Angelou's essay collection *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (1993), and Native American elma Wallis's retelling of a traditional tale, framed by a conversation with er elderly mother, *Two Old Women* (1994).

The final chapter, "Aging Autobiographers: Philosophical Musings and Deepening Wisdom," concludes with three books in which writers speak om one of the most revered literary positions available to an older person, hat of the sage. This chapter again emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of ld age as a point of view. Howell Raines, author of *Fly Fishing through the*

CC-0 In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


*Midlife Crisis* (1991), looks to an older friend and fellow fisherman for guidance as he contemplates late life. Donald Hall's *Life Work* (1993) is a journal he kept as he fought to continue his teaching and writing career at 67 despite the fear and exhaustion brought on by cancer treatments. In *The Measure of My Days* (1968), octogenarian Florida Scott-Maxwell finds meaning in continually recreating herself, her plans, and her life's work.

I am grateful for the texts Waxman introduces me to, as well as for the thematic patterns she finds in these records of late life and weaves across her chapters from such threads as the power of friendship, memory, work, the potential for self-fashioning, and the negotiations between the body's limits and the mind's desires. At the same time, this book leaves readers with unanswered, provocative questions about the boundaries of age identity, given its reach to early midlife writers and its recurring preoccupation with death. I must admit, also, to being less convinced than Waxman of the usefulness of reader response criticism as a means to learn from these writers' experience of aging. While I admire Waxman's willingness to incorporate her own autobiography, the conclusions to which her own experiences led at times constrained my own responses to these texts. Paradoxically, perhaps, I learned most about the anxieties and possibilities of late life from her eloquent, enlightening attention to the heteroglossia of the absorbing autobiographical texts themselves.

*Teresa Mangum*

Diane Bjorklund. *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998. 263 pp. ISBN 0-226-05447-0, $25.00.

Reading Diane Bjorklund's *Interpreting the Self* was a little like sitting down in the wrong movie theater. In the end I liked what I saw, but only once I had stopped expecting something different. Bjorklund analyzes more than one hundred autobiographies published in America over the past two centuries. Her purpose is to identify and track changes within the "culturally shared ideas" which Americans have used to define and discuss the notion of the self since 1800. To that end, she outlines in exhaustive detail four paradigms of selfhood—characterized as "ideal-types" after Max Weber—and situates them to varying degrees in their historical contexts. What Bjorklund discovers is not precisely what she sets out to look for; yet it is quite worthwhile in itself, and rewards the considerable labor that went into producing it. The studies are rich in historical and textual detail, and should provide valuable resources for cultural historians.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Bjorklund is a sociologist, and in her introduction she negotiates a variety of disciplinary tensions and boundaries as she endeavors to bring autobiography into the ranks of what qualifies as "data." She does so with confidence, firm in her belief that she has discovered a mother lode of unmined sociological information. In my view, the book's interdisciplinary bent is the source of both its greatest strengths and weaknesses. Among the strengths stands Bjorklund's ability to introduce a certain precision and scholarly context to terms like "self-concept," "personality," and "development," shedding light on issues obscured by the sometimes sloppy appropriation of social scientific terminology into literary criticism. Her methodical approach, which involves breaking analyses into four distinct categories—"human nature," "components of self," "changes to self," and "self and society"—enables a multilayered comparison across different eras and cultural contexts. Generally speaking, the study is very well organized, lucidly written, and thoroughgoing within the limits it sets for itself. These limits, however, are significant, and only some of them are acknowledged.

Above all, there is the question of what the research actually succeeds in discovering. Does it make good on the ambitious aim of cataloging the past two hundred years of ideal-typical American selfhood? Bjorklund acknowledges that the paradigms she defines are not "comprehensive," and that not every autobiography will fit neatly within them. However, she maintains that they do have representative value, and offers as proof their tendency to present "purer and more coherent patterns of ideas than occur in the vast majority of autobiographies" (13). Here the analysis would have benefited much from considering the ways that "ideal-types"—or, in a different vocabulary, master narratives—do less to reflect majority consensus than to perform it. The absence of such a consideration is especially problematic in light of Bjorklund's data pool: the autobiographical canon as codified more than fifteen years ago in bibliographies from 1976 and 1982. Only one out of every five writers in her sample is a woman, and an even smaller percentage are people of color. When she treats her four paradigms as universally applicable, then, she elides, and thus threatens to duplicate, the process by which the power imbalances that structure all cultural production present those paradigms as "pure"—that is, as neutral and natural, rather than as produced by, and in service to, those imbalances. Bjorklund is not unaware of this difficulty, of course. She explains that her goal "was to explore changes in the content of ideas about the self rather than the uses to which such ideas are put in terms of broader power relations" (171). And yet, this defense rests upon a false opposition of content and use, thus risking the entire project on the shaky supposition that there is any level at which self-constructions do not engage in power relations.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

A more intriguing issue, also related to Bjorklund's research design, concerns her choice of working with autobiographies, and the assumptions that inform that choice. Bjorklund's goal can be likened to Saussure's, in that she hopes to discover the *langue*—that is, the vocabulary and governing rules—of self concept. To that end, she treats her autobiographies as multiple instances of *parole,* which taken collectively will yield up those rules. She makes a compelling case for this approach, pointing out that, although each autobiography constitutes a unique performance, it nevertheless draws by necessity from certain common cultural materials. Further, she convincingly reasons that by reconstructing the overarching logic of those cultural materials we can better understand and appreciate the individual work. Yet one still wonders—why autobiographies alone? Would not the portrait of ideal-types be more credible if drawn across a variety of genres and cultural practices? Why not widen the data pool to include other sources, for instance the sociological investigations of self concept and self identity which comprise the book's literature review? Her answer apparently is that while scholars stand outside of the cultural *langue* to view it critically, autobiographers absorb and reproduce its rules unreflectingly. Only the autobiography counts as *parole.*

This brings me to the question really at stake. Can we approach autobiographies as uninflected utterances of a culture's *langue* of self? Or are they more properly understood as what Michel de Certeau describes as "wandering lines" that form "unforeseeable sentences, partly unreadable paths," obscuring and twisting the normative logics they negotiate (xviii)? According to Bjorklund, people write autobiographies for two reasons: to understand the self and, at the same time, to impress as wide a readership as possible that they are "to be admired by contemporary standards" (13). This accounts for her assumption that autobiographies can be taken as generally faithful productions of cultural norms. Reduced to the twin drives for self-coherence and impression management, the autobiographer has no choice but to preserve intact the cultural rules for self. For he or she relies on these for use as recognized and unquestioned passwords. In *Interpreting the Self,* autobiographers strike one as strictly status quo sorts. If they "contribute to vocabularies of the self by evaluating, adapting, and sometimes rejecting ideas," they do not seem capable of manipulating those ideas toward more subversive effects (14).

Yet, isn't this the primary work done by autobiography? Should we approach the genre as fundamentally about stabilizing, defining, and projecting a favorable self-construction? Or is this, perhaps, an ideal type of our own—a theory of the autobiographical subject as driven at its core by desire

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


or self-coherence and social acceptance? It is an ideal type that informs many studies of autobiography, as Bjorklund's own literature review establishes. But her study acts from and elaborates it to such an extent as to bring its limitations into relief.

Most clear is that this ideal type tends to shut down the exploration of autobiographical effects. Perhaps also it points to an impulse to preserve, in the absence of a metaphysical subject from whom language emanates, a unified set of drives toward language that will serve to stabilize the subject anew. Bjorklund clearly possesses a post-modern appreciation for the opacity of language. She emphasizes that she is investigating "creations" and "constructions" of language, and in her discussion of a writer's relationship to audience, characterizes autobiography as a "performance." But for all this discussion of how language and cultural narrative act upon autobiographers, she still treats *their* language—the autobiographical texts themselves—as windows that swing open to "reveal" assumptions and experience. The ideal type she works from cannot lead to any other conclusion. It obscures the ways in which the limits of language become not merely a "problem," but a preoccupation and even a game for autobiographers. It suppresses the possibility of reading autobiography as a conversation with the codes, or a double-voiced articulation of them. It discourages attention to these moments, which Sidonie Smith describes as "tactical dis/identifications" (21). To use a much noted example, it would not do simply to conclude that Harriet Jacobs uses the "ideal typical" domestic angel as material for self-construction in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* One misreads both the text and the cultural meaning of domestic angelity by not also considering how Jacobs puts that ideal type on trial, exposing its basic connection to white, middle-class, material conditions, and undermining its legitimacy as a site of identification for either herself or her readers.

My point is that critical operations are not only among the richest aspects of autobiography, they are also fully integral to its meaning. To quote de Certeau again, it might be said of autobiography that "[s]tatistical investigation grasps the material of these practices, but not their form; it determines the elements used, but not the 'phrasing' produced by the *bricolage* (the artisan-like inventiveness) and the discursiveness that combine these elements" (xviii). Bracketing the tactics of resistance as merely additive, subordinate to an elemental desire for self-coherence and social acceptance, is to risk not just limited readings but misreadings. As much as autobiographies can be taken as efforts toward self-interpretation which draw upon available codes and narratives, they must be understood just as fundamentally as efforts to renegotiate terms with those codes and narratives, performances of ideology that contest its authority to exhaust meaning.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

If *Interpreting the Self* encounters problems in defining its object of study, the actual studies are generally successful and important in their own right. Bjorklund provides very thoroughly and creatively researched treatments for most of the constructs she investigates. Chapter Three's discussion of self-culture is especially good. The book may not make new contributions to established outlines of intellectual and social history, but it does much to flesh them out, to give coherence, and ground them in examples. Although I found myself repeatedly objecting to assumptions laid out in the introductory chapters, I read the actual studies with interest and appreciation for their detail and care—taking them as what they were: extremely well-executed portraits of select, mostly white and masculine paradigms of identity.

*Katherine Adams*

**WORKS CITED**

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.

Smith, Sidonie. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 10.1 (Spring 1995): 17–33.

Erika Doss. *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith & Image.* Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1999. 289 pp. ISBN 0-7006-0948-2, $24.95.

**IF ONLY VELVET ELVIS WERE HERE**

"Elvis Lives" reads the bumpersticker on a colleague's car. While most of us are fully aware he does not, it is Erika Doss's contention that for any number of his fans, Elvis culture does indeed live. Infusing fans' lives in highly personal ways, this living Elvis culture runs the gamut from the silly to the spiritual to the crassly commercial. And as Doss argues, the uses to which Elvis—and most particularly the imagined Elvis—are put are varied and often communally shared. What these fans make of Elvis is interesting enough as the object of ethnographic study, yet what distinguishes Doss's work is her accessible examination of how Elvis fandom is a quintessentially American cultural phenomenon. For Doss, the phenomenon of Elvis culture is not simply interesting for the many ways some Americans position Elvis as the repository or imaginary of their dreams, desires, and racial ideologies. It is that the practice of making Elvis such an image is fundamentally American. As an act of faith in the individual—in Elvis and in the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


elieving self—Doss sees Elvis culture as a late-twentieth expression of the romises of American culture. The question is, what are those promises, nd why are they held in Elvis? And which Elvis? The sexy 50s crooner emorialized on a US postage stamp? The sequined Vegas lounge act? The reamy fan-painted velvet Elvis sharing wall space with family pictures and liquid-eyed Jesus?

Doss's *Elvis Culture* goes some way to addressing these questions. robing the phenomenon of Elvis, Doss was led to the real "stuff" of Elvis n culture: the intense need of fans and impersonators to pay tribute to the King's" life; the "religious" and emotional significance of Elvis for ome fans; the underpinnings of class and race prejudices among and oward fans; the troubling gender transgressions of Elvis's performance tyle, and of some fans' sexual fantasies about him; and the corporate and opular struggles over Elvis material and meaning. There seems to be a reat cultural need to posit meaning(s) in the images of Elvis. Fundamenally rife with American notions of individualism, of entrepreneurial self-onstruction, of evangelical belief and racial equity, they have tremendous ower for many fans (and for the rest of us who are tangentially touched by hem). To the extent that these meanings are also highly contested, they ormulate a self-perpetuating culture of production and consumption—the conomy of American ideology. Who controls the idea, the image of Elvis, sks Doss, and what does it mean for American popular culture to try to?

As readers might imagine, the "answers" to these questions are multi-aceted, provisional, and not always consistent with fans' (or Elvis, Inc.'s) wn assessments. But Doss's methodology is to represent charitably fans' eaning-making (and their own astute cultural analyses of Elvis culture), hile also critically probing the often unstated or denied assumptions made by these fans (or by Elvis, Inc.) within enough context to provide depth to ur understanding of how Elvis culture works. For instance, the spiritual onnection some fans feel with Elvis is read within the context of American vangelicalism. The strength of such a methodology is that Doss develops a text most Elvis fans could actually read while she raises questions about ome of their more one-dimensional assessments of Elvis. This is particularly evident in her chapters "All White Elvis" and "Who Owns Elvis." In "All White Elvis" Doss considers the racial "white-washing" of Elvis by white fans who not only deny the Black musical heritage of Elvis's music and style, but (with some black readers) view him as the poster-boy for Confederate ol' boy politics. Meanwhile, still other (mostly but not exclusively white) fans see him as a promoter of racial harmony. "Who Owns Elvis" addresses the "white-washing" of the late, great, bloated, pill-popping

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Elvis by Elvis, Inc., a multinational company controlled by Priscilla Presley. So "pure" is "Elvis" in the corporate imaginary that competing ways of imagining Elvis—particularly the sexual or the Velvet "cheap"—are squashed under the weight of "intellectual property" lawsuits.

However contentious these racial and corporate meanings; however personally expressive the material culture collections of artifacts on altars, visual, or installation art; or however deeply felt the spiritual and sexual connection to an idealized Elvis, it is the persistence of Elvis in the everyday culture of these fans that is amazing. And so insistent is the testimonial impulse of these Elvis-sighters, believers, and imaginers that it infects the reader. Within the space of three weeks, "Elvis" appeared everywhere in my life: in a "Mother Goose and Grimm" cartoon with a punch line about a lion, "the king of beasts," as a "cat Elvis impersonator"; on the jukebox in Montreal's Galaxy Diner singing "Teddy Bear"; on the "heartbreak hotel"-addressed and "return to sender"-stamped envelope pegged to a kitchen utility board of a friend of a friend; with airbrushed and glossy 1950s handsomeness in an iconic photo marking the "Landmarks" option of musical choices in *USAirways Attaché* magazine; as #2 (of 100 Greatest Entertainers) in *Entertainment Weekly;* in a new book, *Elvis Day by Day;* on the schlocky TV show *Pacific Blue* as a character refers to a bike with faux tiger seat cover as an "Elvis bike"; in a letter to Dear Abby sporting the headline "Mother of an Elvis impersonator is ready to check into Heart-break Hotel"; on Oprah's celebrity auction show, highlighting fans Carol Winkel, who paid $32,500 for a pair of his sunglasses (a sum that left Oprah momentarily speechless; she recovered to try them on and ham it up, singing "love me true"), and Jim from Houston, who paid over $450,000 for Elvis's "Aloha cape" and "peacock belt," not to mention over a quarter million for his 1956 Lincoln Continental and (canceled) Shell and Exxon gasoline credit cards.

Such a chronicle of "Elvis" sightings might seem silly or tedious (or meager if you're a better Elvis watcher than I), but the point is that I was noticing ubiquitous, multireferential, celebrated Elvis for the first time since the 1970s, when my younger, teenaged sister would sit for hours in glassy-eyed obsession watching TV reruns of Elvis's B-movies (which I found silly and tedious). Since I had the arrival of Erika Doss's book to thank for riveting my attention on the Elvisiana among us, I also had her accessible, useful, and often engaging examination as a guide to making sense of it all. Why had the visual and material culture of Elvis seemed to grow exponentially since his death (and why hadn't I noticed)? How had Elvis's image become so deeply meaningful to fans, and what compelled

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

eir continued fandom? How had Elvis become synonymous with a white y definition of "American rock & roll" despite history? How had I man- ed not to follow Paul Simon to Graceland? And where had all the Velvet vises gone?

All of this is to say, that if you've finished reading Peter Guralnick's finitive two-volume biography *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis esley*, you might consider Elvis through the lens of fan culture. But be epared for Yogi Berra's deja vu all over again. After finishing the draft of is review, I read Ken Tucker's text on Presley as *Entertainment Weekly*'s entertainer (after The Beatles). However contradictory and paradoxical lvis might be, it appears that cultural critics circulate the same rhetorical mings—from personal evocations of Elvis-reading to "left the building" ichés. While such similarities may be characteristic of this reviewer's lim- ed imagination, they are, more to the point, indicative of the pervasive ays we collectively make sense of the ever-present Elvis and of popular lture generally. Finding meaning in (and "owning") pop cult figures, pecially when as famously celebrated, contained, and reviled (in his early reer) as Elvis, is necessarily bound by the issues and desires and concep- al frameworks available to our popular imagination. Not only will the elvet Elvises (and all other Elvisiana) always be with us, but the ways we ovet and dismiss them will be, too. For as Doss demonstrates, Elvis culture ill be a vital part of American culture as long as it remains in the hearts, inds, and pocketbooks of Elvis fans. And if Doss has anything to do with , there will always be a velvet Elvis with which to reconcile our selves.

*Lynda Goldstein*

Hazel V. Carby. *Race Men: The W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998. 191 pp. ISBN 0-674-74558-2, $24.00.

Race has always been controversial and divisive in this country. Unfortu- nately, it is likely to continue as America's Achilles' heel in the next centu- y. A late 1999 ABC News poll revealed that one in four Americans thought hat racism and prejudice will be the "biggest problems people must deal with in the new millennium." Indeed, racism and prejudice were most often hosen as the number one problem in the twenty-first century by both blacks and whites. It was, therefore, prophetic that W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the most acknowledged black scholars, accurately predicted in *The Souls of Black Folk* "that the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of color line" (46–47). However, what many observers may not be aware of, or acknowledge, is that sexism and intra-race relations, particularly in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the black community, may also present some problems in the twenty-first century if efforts are not made to curb them.

In *Race Men,* Hazel V. Carby goes beyond the debate on race by tackling black masculinity and the danger of excluding, ignoring, or marginalizing the needs, interests, and concerns of the black woman and black femininity. The author poses questions about, and examines the nature of, the cultural representations of many forms of black masculinity at different historical moments in different media. She argues that Du Bois' narrow and rigid code of black masculinity remains implicitly but firmly in the works of leading black male scholars today. Furthermore, *Race Men* shows how the defining images of masculinity operate socially and politically in the US, and how they exclude females.

In *The Souls of Black Folk,* W. E. B. Du Bois imagines black people in ways that are conceptually analogous to imagining a nation within the United States. In addition, he argues that black people and their cultural traditions do not exist in opposition to the national ideals, but on the contrary, embody those ideals. He asserts that black people are integral to the formation and maintenance of the nation to which they have contributed their culture and labor in laying the foundations of a vast economic empire. Hazel Carby notes that Du Bois "offered new and alternative ways to formulate complex issues on race and nation" (29). Furthermore, she maintains that Du Bois "challenged the hegemony of the national and racial formations in the United States" at the dawn of the twentieth century in ways that "both assumed and privileged a discourse of black masculinity" (10).

Readers who are interested in the life and contributions of Paul Robeson will find *Race Men* enlightening. It covers his life and professional career, including critical reviews of the concert and film performances by the multi-talented but misunderstood Robeson. For a time, Paul Robeson was not only a remarkable athlete, a good-looking and an imposing man, an acclaimed actor, and a singer of Negro spirituals, but also a national icon. Nude photographs of Robeson were among Nickolas Muray's celebrity portrait collection titled *The Revealing Eye.* Those photographs portrayed immaculate, ideal, art-worthy, naked bodies that were published not only for art students, but also for the general public. But "what makes the Robeson photographs particularly unusual is that nude studies of the black male body were so rare in this period" (50). By the 1940s, however, the man who was once a national hero, and whose nude pictures were among those of America's celebrities, had been vilified because of his unwavering commitment to socialism.

Carby's contribution to the literature on Paul Robeson is significant in another respect. She notes rightly that the star's performance is frequently

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


olated from those of his accompanist Lawrence Brown, who was also the usical arranger and collector of Robeson's spirituals. She emphasizes that own's association with Robeson must be understood as a musical partrship that has been called "one of the most superb musical collaborations American musical history" (93). Carby's analysis of the career of Robeson *Race Men* throws some light on the complex life of one of the most talted, but misunderstood black men ever to live in the US.

Carby uses the writings of C. L. R. James about the revolutionary leader Haiti, Toussaint L'Overture, and cricket as evidence of the social and olitical perspectives of black masculinity. In the late nineteenth century, e Haitian revolution was frequently linked to slave rebellions in North merica, and was used as "the historical landscape in which the possibilities r black male autonomy, self-government, and patriarchal black nationood could be enacted" (113). Thus, Toussaint L'Overture emerged as a opular model for creating contemporary images of a revolutionary black onsciousness.

It is important to stress that James' work on Toussaint L'Overture dealt ith historical events, and since the leader of the Haitian revolution was ale, it is difficult to expect James to treat L'Overture as anything other. nd yet, while crediting the revolution to Toussaint and his male assocites, James was also aware that "all successful revolutionary leaders need his combination of maternal and paternal reproductive capacity" (129). In his way, he acknowledges the female womb that bears the revolutionary ale leader.

Miles Davis was a certified jazz great, an innovator, and an influential umpeter who epitomized "cool jazz." But even as a musician, he attracted ttention for his unorthodoxies. Whether or not Davis was a misogynist is ebatable. However, very few people are likely to question Carby for criticizing Davis's relationship with his mother, wives, children, or colleagues. No black male should be excused for physical, verbal, or psychological abuse f another person, male or female. It must also be noted that Carby's own nalysis shows that Davis could be violent to men as well. For example, Thelonius Monk is reported to have seen Davis slap John Coltrane's "face nd punch him in the stomach, presumably about something Coltrane had or hadn't played, and Monk immediately told Coltrane he did not have to put up with such treatment and asked him to work with him" (154). Since a major attribute of jazz is improvisation, it is difficult to imagine why Davis would slap one of his sidemen for playing or not playing what he expected.

Some readers are likely to find Carby's characterization of male-centered writing unfair and potentially divisive in the black struggle for fairness and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

equal opportunities in America. Even if that criticism has some merit, there is the danger of diluting the black struggles in the New World with gender politics, and thus leaving the real problems facing blacks unresolved. One can also raise an issue with Carby's argument that "James's life and the contemporary moment in which cultural critics write about James share many implicit assumptions about masculinity, including the gendered segregation of sporting institutions" (125). Even if cricket espoused "gendered" segregation and masculinity, this was neither caused by the people of Trinidad nor by James, but by the British, who introduced the game to that country. In fact, many other sporting events, such as football and ice hockey, have also largely been gender segregated. Until recently, soccer was a male sport, and the British "net ball" was a female sport. Indeed, until the Education Amendments Act of 1972 prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender in educational institutions receiving federal aid was enacted in the United States, women athletes did not have as many opportunities as men. The fact is, before the 1920s, the US was largely a male-dominated society. For example, it was not until after the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified on August 26, 1920, that women enjoyed suffrage in the United States.

*Race Men* is a well-researched work. It deals not only with the complex relationships between black men and women, but also among black men of different sexual, career, and social orientations. Many readers are likely to have a better understanding of the complex lives and political beliefs of Robeson, Du Bois, and L'Overture, as well as of the cultural contributions of Davis, Leadbelly, Danny Glover, and others. It must also be noted that Carby correctly asserts that "*The Souls of Black Folk* was produced at a time when the nation was internally organized into a system of rigid racial segregation maintained and policed by the politics of terror" (27). To that one may add, however, that Du Bois' book was also released at a time when "men dominated" the social and political scene in America. Although this does not make it right, it can be argued that *The Souls of Black Folk* only mirrored the practice at the time, so it is unrealistic to expect it to be politically correct by today's standards.

Hazel Carby's candid rejection of black male-centeredness in scholarship and popular culture in America must be an eye-opener for black scholars, writers, and leaders. Any group of people who has been oppressed and marginalized cannot afford to engage in acts of oppression and exclusion themselves, particularly against their own. Unless black male leaders can adequately and effectively deal with the needs, interests, and concerns of the black female, then one would have to agree with Carby that these leaders cannot claim to speak with any authority as legitimate black spokespersons.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


In a recent essay, Derrick Bell implicitly raises the question of whether ctions by men on behalf of women are always appropriate—whether such ale activism can in fact be paternalistic and/or sexist. He discusses the nforeseen ramifications of his leaving Harvard in protest because of its law hool's failure to hire and tenure a woman of color. Bell concludes that, though his protest was meant to support the rights of black female pro-ssors, it was interpreted by some as selfish and sexist. Admitting that none f the women his protest affected asked him to act on their behalf, Bell serts that, as disruptive and destabilizing as his protest was, it achieved reatly needed change. In fact, he notes that his departure in protest helped politicize students and, to a lesser degree, the faculty about diversity, hich eventually led to Lani Guinier's appointment as Harvard Law hool's first tenured woman of color. Especially when they speak on ehalf of black America, black males must be sensitive to the views and crit-ism of black feminism. Black feminists must also be aware of the poten-al problems of unrestrained criticisms. Indeed, Houston Baker cautions us hat, while it is important to criticize instances of sexism in the black com-unity, we should be careful about how, and in what contexts criticisms e made.

*Race Men* is a must read for "people interested in identity politics of ce, gender, and sexuality." Even readers who disagree with Ms. Carby's entral theme are certainly likely to gain some understanding of feminist iews on black masculinity, and her criticism of paternalism and sexism in ontemporary America.

*Daniel Boamah-Wiafe*

Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, eds. *African American Pioneers in Anthropology.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1999. 296 pp. ISBN 0-252-02430-3, $49.95, cloth; ISBN 0-252-06736-3, $21.95, paper.

Zora Neale Hurston (1901–1960) is better known for her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), than for her work as an anthropologist and folklorist in *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938). In *African American Pioneers in Anthropology,* editors Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison have compiled thirteen life histories about a generation of black scholars, including Hurston, who became anthropologists between 1920 and 1955. The intellectual biographies in *Pioneers* describe anthropology from the vantage point of its earliest African American adherents, their careers, and the theoretical and methodological interventions they brought to the discipline in

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

the first half of the twentieth century. Concerned with racial ideologies, native perspectives, and the often pejorative representations of African and African American cultures, these anthropologists worked in a "vindicationist" mode to counter racial denigration with academic theory and social activism. The editors suggest that this vindicationist framework forms "the clearest continuity in African-American intellectual history over the past few centuries" (12).

The biographies in *Pioneers* are at their best when they illustrate the strategies, including activism and vindicationist praxis, that African American anthropologists used to counter their experiences of institutional racism, gender subordination, and paternalism. These experiences stymied, and sometimes ended, the anthropological research of some pioneering African Americans working in the African Diaspora in Europe, the Caribbean, and North, South, and Central America. Some found work outside of the discipline, or left academia altogether. Others were driven to greater rigor and productivity.

Though Louis Eugene King (1898–1981) was one of the first people to complete a study about rural African Americans, he never found employment in academia, and eventually worked for the Navy. Despite his significant abilities, William S. Willis, Jr. (1921–1983), referred to in both Hymes and Mullings, also found it difficult to find an academic job. In 1964, after a long and frustrating search, he became the first African American faculty member at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Expected to teach more classes than the rest of the faculty, he was strained by his treatment and finally left due to overt racial harassment by the head of his department. Willis went on to write perceptively about racism and the history of anthropology. While many of the life histories in *Pioneers* are marked by decades of academic marginalization and a lack of institutional support, African American anthropologists like Willis utilized their perspectives, and the theoretical rigor required to support their positions, to take a proactive stance in the discipline.

During the era of de jure segregation in the United States, African Americans who acquired advanced education usually entered disciplines such as education and social work, considered to be the most useful in handling racial problems. These were also the disciplines available to the few African Americans who received training at institutions that would instruct people of color, and more importantly, these were the disciplines in which jobs would be available in a segregated society. In the early twentieth century, anthropology was a relatively new and white male dominated discipline, and its evolutionist theories and studies of people in Africa, the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


mericas, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands contributed to rationales for ractices of racial subjugation (see Hymes 128–31; Mullings 32). Between e 1920s and 1940s, however, new anthropological theories about race d culture, and particularly the positions Franz Boas mobilized against ti-Semitism, appealed to African Americans who aimed to investigate the eoretical bases of "scientific racism." Their interest coincided with tense terwar racial relations in the United States and a rising mainstream inter- in the cultures of segregated African Americans.

These conditions prompted several philanthropic institutions, already vested in the study of the American Indian, to extend their support to clude studies of the American Negro. Influential anthropologists, includ- g Boas, Edward Sapir, Robert Redfield, and Melville Herskovits, were nded by such institutions as the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation d the Rosenwald Fellowships to conduct studies of African Americans. hese anthropologists sought African Americans interested in the social sci- nces to assist them in their research in communities where white ethnog- phers would have had difficulty collecting accurate data. Black searchers were intended to be native informants for white scholars, and in ost cases were used to gather data because they had access to the social d cultural codes of African America.

Though they worked as their assistants, most of these African Americans ere not encouraged by their white professors to attain advanced degrees in nthropology. The biographies in *Pioneers* tell some of the many rationali- tions that white anthropologists had for their reluctance to advance their frican American students. In personal communications with other anthro- ologists, some "mentors" lauded their students' work on ethnographic rojects; but in official letters of recommendation to fund an African merican student's independent research, their assessments often became mbivalent. Many of the pioneer African American anthropologists experi- nced treatment similar to that received by Charles Blooah. A West African issionary student from Liberia, Blooah was "discovered" in Chicago by nguists Sapir and Fay-Cooper Cole. Though they educated Blooah in lin- uistic anthropology, John H. Stanfield exposes correspondence in which Cole admitted to foundation official Leonard Outhwaite that Sapir and Cole were "not so much interested in having [Blooah] obtain a degree as to ee that he has the proper equipment to do the work for which he is fitted" (85). Although he was an enhanced linguist and native anthropologist, Sapir and Cole only considered Blooah suitable to work as an assistant and nterpreter for other "real" anthropologists.[1] Hurston and King received imilar treatment.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Many of these "real" anthropologists, such as Aleš Hrdlička and Melville Herskovits, were most ambivalent about the intellectual capacity of their African American students, including Hurston and Montague Cobb (1904–1990). Herskovits suggested that African Americans such as Hurston were "too emotional" to analyze ethnographic data, though she was considered knowledgeable enough to collect it. Cobb's mentor, physical anthropologist Hrdlička, even went so far as to claim that the "Negro race" was "retarded," although he considered Cobb, who received an M.D. from Howard University before he trained as an anthropologist, an exception (Rankin-Hill and Blakey 114).

Returning to Howard University to teach for several decades, Cobb integrated, and eventually headed, numerous professional societies, including the Association of Physical Anthropology, of which he became president. He organized several major conferences, and conducted studies that disproved racist theories, including one involving Olympic athletes. Cobb published over 1,100 articles in major journals, and illustrated the impact of racism on African American health in ways that helped to change U.S. health care policy. Biographers Lesley M. Rankin-Hill and Michael Blakey note, however, that despite his rigor and productivity, Cobb's work is rarely referenced by contemporary scholars.

In *Journey to Accompong* (1946), Katherine Dunham records that she was the first visitor to stay in this remote Maroon village in Jamaica. As the descendants of freedom-fighting African people who had escaped enslavement during the colonial era to form autonomous communities in the mountains, the Maroons were particularly distrustful of strangers. In her biographical account of Dunham in *Pioneers,* Joyce Achenbrenner writes that the people of Accompong nonetheless responded to Dunham, and shared insider knowledge with her not only because of her openness and ethnographic skill, but also because they considered her one of the lost people from their African homeland (143).

Born in 1901, Dunham wrote about her experiences in the African Diaspora in her autobiographies *A Touch of Innocence* and *Island Possessed,* both published in 1959. Though the influential anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote the introduction to the French edition of her seminal study *Dances of Haiti* (1947), most anthropological histories have ignored Dunham's ethnographies. She eventually moved away from academia because she considered it elitist and stifling. She started a dance troupe, often using her anthropological research as the basis for her choreographies. Dunham's internationally known troupe traveled throughout the world, performing until the early 1960s.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

Dunham's cultural and political activism in support of the people of the African Diaspora continues. As a human rights activist in the 1990s, the octogenarian Dunham fasted for more than a month to draw attention to the U.S. treatment of Haitian immigrants. Despite the lack of institutional support, her efforts have included the creation of an ethnographic museum in East St. Louis, Illinois, based on material gathered during her extensive travels. Dunham's life as an anthropologist, ethnographer, dancer, humanitarian, and political activist exemplifies the achievements of the activist-scholar.

Another dynamic Black woman anthropologist who contributed to both academia and her community, Irene Diggs (1906–1998) trained with ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, and received her doctorate at the University of Havana in Cuba in the 1940s. She chronicled issues of race in Afro-Latin America and Afro-Anglo America for both popular and academic magazines and journals. Diggs worked with a number of Black leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois, and she wrote and traveled widely, visiting many places in Africa, South America, Eurasia, and the Caribbean. Diggs's work on racialization and racial identity anticipates and remains relevant to social anthropology and to many current issues about hybridity and social stratification.

Although many anthropologists of color have contributed to the discipline, anthropology has traditionally valued the knowledge claims made from the outsider perspective of the white male stranger, and devalued the work of the native or racially similar ethnographer. This may be in part because indigenous or subjugated perspectives sometimes contradict Western epistemologies about race, society, and cultural practices. Western anthropologists have omitted many of these native perspectives by relying on an ideology of "scientific objectivity." In his critique of the discipline, William S. Willis, Jr. argued that social scientists cannot avoid "leaning to one side," and therefore must consider the impact such one-sided reporting has had in supporting racist domination. In the past, colonial governments mobilized anthropologists to "lean" towards the side of scientific rationalizations for racial subordination. Willis stressed that anthropology must acknowledge and attend to this part of its history. Better social theories, he suggested, could be produced if the native, subaltern, and post-colonial perspectives of "black and colored peoples" were included in anthropological perspectives (Hymes).

Willis's work is consistent with that of this first generation of Black anthropologists, who insisted on improving anthropology methodologically and hermeneutically, particularly by testing racial ideologies. Biographer

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Willie L. Baber writes in this volume about how the biases and contradictions of supposedly rational "scientific racism" influenced the work of vindicationist anthropologist St. Clair Drake (1911–1990):

> While completing his doctorate Drake in 1946 joined the faculty of Roosevelt University, an experimental institution . . . in opposition to anti-Semitism and white supremacy in education and explicitly dedicated to an active fight against racial discrimination and segregation. Post-World War II optimism about changing the attitudes and behavior of Americans found its way into the curriculum. . . . With confidence, Drake [fought a] battle against Arthur de Gobineau, Neville Chamberlain, Lothrop Stoddard, and cliques of reactionary biologists. (204)

The perspectives of and criticisms by African American anthropologists such as Willis and Drake point out that anthropology must scrutinize racist ideologies, colonial domination, and gender oppressions—and that this scrutiny includes becoming vigilant about its own contribution to these practices.

Though their work complicates and enriches the discipline, Black anthropologists have made their greatest impact outside of academic anthropology. The work of Allison Davis (1902–1983), for example, was used in arguments to desegregate public education, and the activism of Arthur Huff Fauset (1899–1983) influenced the civil rights movement. Zora Neale Hurston is more often recognized for her literary and feminist contributions than she is for her anthropology. Though Hurston innovated experimental and literary ethnography, anthropologist Clifford Geertz never mentions her in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author;* nor is she mentioned in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences,* edited by George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer.

Other forms of amnesia are illustrated by the omission of African American anthropologists from *Afro-American Anthropology* (1970). Although editors Norman E. Whitten and John F. Swed briefly mention Zora Neale Hurston, and list Haitian anthropologist Jean Price-Mars as a reference, Melville Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits are offered as the progenitors of the study of African America. Despite being an innovator in the study of urban anthropology and the African Diaspora, St. Clair Drake is mentioned only as a sociologist rather than as an anthropologist. However, it is true that many of anthropology's progenitors were sociologists and historians, including W. E. B. DuBois, whose ground-breaking urban study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) influenced the anthropology of Boas, Irene Diggs, and St. Clair Drake. Yet Du Bois is also omitted from

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

*...o-American Anthropology.* Only one African American, Betty Lou Valen-...e, is included. Her article, "Making the scene, digging the action, and ...lling it like it is: anthropologists at work in a dark ghetto," written with ...r husband Charles Valentine, expresses ambivalence about the position-...g of a racially mixed team doing fieldwork in the "dark ghetto" of African ...nerica. At the time a junior scholar, Betty Lou Valentine became an ...thropologist a generation after the anthropologists in *Pioneers.* The ...sence of the earliest African American anthropologists from *Afro-...nerican Anthropology,* and Valentine's appearance at the very end of the ...lume, suggest the marginalization of the racialized and gendered per-...ective in academia.

In a vindicationist and Foucauldian mode, the editors of these intellec-...al biographies comment that the inclusion of pioneering African Ameri-...n and other scholars of color in the canons of the social sciences would ...lve many disciplinary contradictions:

> Anthropology, like all other disciplines . . . appropriates, disguises, and buries certain knowledges within the body of systematizing theory. It also disqualifies and relegates other knowledges to marginal ranks. . . . For anthropology to be successfully reinvented, recaptured, and decolonized, [anthropology's practitioners] must come to terms with its hierarchy-producing discourses and practices and emancipate its subjugated knowledges. (4)

*African American Pioneers in Anthropology* will introduce some readers ..., and enhance other readers' awareness of, anthropology, Black intellec-...al biography, twentieth century African Americana, and vindicationism. ...or this reason the volume would benefit from an index. The introduction ...nd endnotes are detailed, however, and invite the reader, whether scholar ...r layperson, to pursue the histories and literatures of African Americans in ...nthropology. The editors of *Pioneers* have presented the initial phase of the ...indicationist history of the discipline, and have also succeeded in making ...ss abstract the experience of African Americans facing institutional racism ...nd sexism in the United States in the first part of this century. These biog-...aphies also point to how dishonest anthropology is when the discipline ...ails to acknowledge its past, and when it ignores, in the words of anthro-...pologists Johnnetta B. Cole and Sheila S. Walker, its own "intimate asso-...iations with colonialism, imperialism, and racism." Anthropology must ...lso come to acknowledge that some of its former subjects of study have ...tudied, innovated, and made incisive critiques of the discipline. The biog-...aphers in *Pioneers* illustrate this by showing that native anthropology, vin-...dicationist practice, and antiracist social activism provide some of the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

remedies to anthropology's contradictory past. At the same time, these theoretical innovations strengthen anthropology's future.

*B. C. Harrison*

## NOTES

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Though we share a common surname, and are African American anthropologists, the two editors and the reviewer are not related to one another.

1. *Pioneers* does not include the West African-born Blooah because the volume focuses on African-descended anthropologists from the United States; Louis Eugene King and Elliot Skinner are present because they immigrated to the U.S. from Barbados and Trinidad, respectively, when they were young.

## WORKS CITED

Aschenbrenner, Joyce. "Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist, Artist, Humanist." Harrison and Harrison. 137–53.

Baber, Willie L. "St. Clair Drake: Scholar and Activist." Harrison and Harrison. 191–212.

Cole, Johnnetta B., and Sheila Walker, ser. eds. "Black Anthropology." Parts 1 and 2. *The Black Scholar* 11, nos. 7–8 (1980): 1.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Philadelphia Negro.* 1899. Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson, 1973.

Dunham, Katherine. *Dances of Haiti.* 1947. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1983.

_____. *Island Possessed.* 1959. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969.

_____. *Journey to Accompong.* 1946. Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1971.

_____. *A Touch of Innocence.* 1959. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1994.

Geertz, Clifford. *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988.

Hymes, Dell. *Reinventing Anthropology.* New York: Random House, 1974.

Marcus, George E., and Michael M. J. Meyers. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.

Mullings, Leith. *On Our Own Terms: Race, Class, and Gender in the Lives of African American Women.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Rankin-Hill, Lesley M., and Michael L. Blakey. "W. Montague Cobb: Physical Anthropologist, Anatomist, and Activist." Harrison and Harrison. 101–36.

Stanfield, John H. *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science.* Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985.

Whitten, Norman E., Jr., and John F. Swed. *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives.* New York: The Free Press, 1970.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

Michael Erben, ed. *Biography and Education: A Reader.* London: Falmer, 1998. 168 pp. ISBN 0-7507-0751-8, £15.95.

*Biography and Education: A Reader,* edited by Michael Erben, is the ninenth volume in the Social Research and Education Series, a group of books devoted to investigating trends and methods in educational research. As the Series editor, Robert Burgess, indicates in the Preface, the volumes provide theoretical overviews of fields, and contributors "raise critical conerns that are particular to the field of education and reflect on the implications of research for educational policy and practice" (iv). The aim of this volume in particular is to aid students, teachers, and researchers in their work with autobiographical and biographical material in and out of the classroom. The book's eleven essays provide strong support for the use of autobiography and biography as tools for learning, and offer sound advice for researchers and teachers interested in using auto/biographical methods in their work.

Biography and autobiography increasingly have become both the subjects for study in literature courses and the basis for assignments in writing classes in many colleges and universities in the United States and United Kingdom, as researchers and teachers see the potential of life stories for developing reading and writing competence. Michael Erben acknowledges in the Introduction the growing popularity of biography and life courses in undergraduate and graduate education, and the increasing amount of scholarship in biography, suggesting that there's a consequent need to assess the variety of research work being done in the field. The essays in this volume address that need: their variety in approach and content indicates the range of possibilities for conducting research and using such research in educational contexts.

As Erben points out, despite the diversity in these essays, the important connection among them is the recognition that "individual motivations and social influences have no easy demarcation" (1). Biographical research develops the relationship of individual lives—and individuals within their group identities—to the culture that surrounds them. Insofar as lives are part of a cultural and social network, information gathered from biographical research can reveal something of the wider society. This interaction between the individual and the social, and the complexities that arise from an awareness of that interaction, forms the basis of much of the research and study that the essays address. Contributors to this collection, all from universities in the UK, chose case studies and commentary, interviews and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

direct transcription, theory and applications, interspersed biographical data and autobiographical response, as methods to reveal biographical subjects and to illuminate the ways that individual and culture affect one another.

The first essay, by Erben, describes the essential characteristics of biographical research, which he categorizes as empirical information, imaginative reconstruction, and narrative analysis. Highlighting the importance of purpose as a crucial element in biographical research, he suggests that the kinds of data that might be gathered, as well as the variety and amount of data, depend on the aim of the study: "That objective being the purpose of the research, without which investigations would remain amorphous and pointless" (9).

This essay serves as a fine introduction to the ten essays that follow in the collection. Each demonstrates a different approach to gathering data, to using the imagination, or to making narrative central in the presentation of the research. Robin Usher's essay, "The Story of the Self: Education, Experience and Autobiography," critiques the familiar "personal experience" writing assignment by suggesting how much more complex that task is than is traditionally assumed, and how artful, rather than truthful, the telling of personal story is. She argues that autobiography is understood and taught in a limited and uncritical way, and that students need to see the constructed character of the past as they write, the ideological character of what they choose. Usher speaks to the powerful effect language has over event, and her suggestions can allow teachers to emphasize the shaping power of writing, the role of revision and of form in making meaning. Interestingly, Usher notes that autobiographical accounts written by women and minorities often tell stories less linear and "sovereign," which suggests that using autobiographical accounts written by members of these groups might expand students' options for creating their own autobiographical narratives.

Most of the following essays provide life histories of students, teachers, and researchers in a variety of contexts and situations. Each reveals the factors that surround educational achievement and struggle—class, gender, disability, sexual orientation—through case studies, interviews, diaries, and published accounts. In "Fragments of a Life: Recursive Dilemmas," David Scott writes a case history of a teacher's life in Ireland, showing how individual and culture interpenetrate, as the teacher reconceptualizes her past and present. Scott interjects his commentary alongside the teacher's reflections to help readers make sense of the data, and to demonstrate the "fragments of a life continually remade" (43). Other teacher narratives are "Voices from the Margins: Regulation and Resistance in the Lives of Lesbian Teachers," by Gill Clarke, and "A Biographical Approach to the History of Education: Nineteenth-Century Nonconformist Lives and Educational Ex-

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


ansion," by Diana Jones, both of which offer insights into how teachers ave accommodated and resisted institutional constraints in their personal nd professional lives.

The lives of students are explored by writers studying diverse groups. hris Mann's study of working class adolescent girls preparing for advanced evel examinations in the UK, Zoë Parker's account of "PhD Students and he Auto/Biographies of Their Learning," and Mich Page's "Collecting lices of College Dropouts' Lives" all use a variety of methods to illuminate he rationales students have for the educational choices they make and the ocietal expectations their roles place on them as they make these choices. Hilary Dickinson's "Perspectives on Learning Difficulties through Biog-aphies" analyzes the narratives written by parents of special needs children. ach of these essays focuses on purpose and on method, as well as on the ata, and suggests how these narratives function to reveal more than the ndividual story.

The final essay in the collection, Peter Figueroa's "Autobiographical ccount of the Education of an African Slave in Eighteenth Century Eng-nd," is a study of the autobiographical account of Olaudah Equiano, who escribes in his autobiography the developmental path he followed in over-oming barriers to become educated and highly literate and successful in is life in England. That essay has close ties to an earlier chapter by Brian oberts, "An Auto/Biographical Account of Educational Experience," here the author details his own working class upbringing in the 1950s, nd speculates on how he achieved educational success, how he was able to make the boundary crossing" (113). Both these essays reveal the interplay etween the individual life and its social context, and hint at the rhetorical urposes of autobiography.

As someone who often teaches biographies, and often asks students to rite autobiographical accounts in writing classes, I found this volume both seful and provocative. Biography, it seems, is always in part auto/biogra-hy, since rhetorical purpose—to advocate, to destigmatize, to reveal, to laim—is integrally a part of the subject's and the biographer's aim. A ecognition of the intersubjective character of biography only lends weight o what teachers of literacy have always claimed, the power of language to efine and describe what we call reality.

*Hephzibah Roskelly*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# REVIEWED ELSEWHERE

Contributing editors William Bruneau, Brian Cassity, Michael Fassiotto, Douglas Hilt, Corey Hollis, Noel Kent, Gabriel Merle, Barbara Bennett Peterson, Forrest R. Pitts, Bronwen Solyom, and Paula Willoquet-Maricondi provided the excerpts for this issue.

Publications reviewed include the *The American Historical Review, American Quarterly, American Scientist, French Studies, The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), *Guardian Weekly, Journal of Asian Studies, Journal of World History, Le Monde des Livres, Los Angeles Times Book Review (LATBR), New York Review of Books (NYRB), New York Times Book Review (NYTBR), New Yorker, Opera News, Pacific Historical Review, Presidential Studies Quarterly, Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, Science, Times Literary Supplement (TLS), Washington Post Weekly Edition (WP)*, and *The Weekend Australian.*

**Addams, Jane**

*A Useful Woman: The Early Life of Jane Addams.* Gioia Dilberto. New York: Lisa Drew/Scribner, 1999. 318 pp. $26.00.

"The book's subtitle, 'The Early Life of Jane Addams,' is misleadingly modest: Dilberto gives us Addams's life through the end of the 19th century, when, at the age of 40, she was already an influential figure in Chicago and was gaining national renown. The author greatly admires her subject, who she includes with Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. on 'a roster of great Americans . . . who made lasting contributions to social justice.' But perhaps because the public Addams has been fairly well chronicled, Dilberto focuses on her private life—as documented in letters to the family, co-workers and close friends."

Michael Kazin. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 24.

**'Aini, Sadr Al-din**

*The Sands of Oxus: Boyhood Reminiscences of Sadriddin Aini.* Sadriddin Aini. Translated from the Tajik Persian with an Introduction by John R. Perry and Rachel Lehr. Bibliotheca Iranica: Literature Series 2. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1998. 277 pp. $24.95.

"Sadr al-din 'Aini (1878–1954) is considered by many to be the 'father of the modern Tajik language.' . . . A member of the Young Bukharan intellectual movement, 'Aini went on to become one of Central Asia's leading educational reformers. . . . He was the first to write novels in the newly defined Tajik language (as opposed to classical Persian), in addition to poetry, short stories, scholarly studies, essays, and other literary works,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


ough he also wrote in the Turkish dialect now known as Uzbek. . . . ini's account of village life at the twilight of Central Asia's premodern istory provides a rare picture of traditional society in that part of the orld. Though the author's reformist biases are evident in his harsh por- ayal of social injustices, economic hardship, and the stagnation brought n by fossilized traditions, his words paint a rich canvas of bygone life that an hardly fail to move the reader."

Richard Foltz. *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.3 (Aug. 1999): 824–25.

**llen, Woody**

*Voody Allen: A Biography.* John Baxter. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1999. 488 pp. $27.00.

Touted as the first major study of Allen since his breakup with Mia Farrow nd his pairing off with her adopted daughter, John Baxter's 'Woody Allen' evotes a chapter to each film or two, chronicling the minutiae right down o the production costs and box office receipts. The same dispassionate tone s brought to bear on Allen's personal life."

Ted Loos. *NYTBR,* Jan. 2, 2000: 15.

**lthusser, Louis**

*ouis Althusser, Un sujet sans procès: Anatomie d'un passé très récent.* Eric Marty. Paris: Gallimard, "L'Infini," 1999. 130 pp. F130.

The destiny of this philosopher of international repute, who strangled his ife (1980), was discharged without even appearing in court, confined to mental hospital, and wrote a staggering autobiography (1985), is haunt- ng the end of the century. For Eric Marty, the time has come for the case o stand trial: severe and uncompromising as it is, this book is a kind of ribute to Truth and to the man who became unable to serve it.

Patrick Kékichian. *Le Monde des Livres,* Nov. 5, 1999: 1.

**lvarez, A.**

*Where Did It All Go Right?* A. Alvarez. London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999. 244 pp. £20.00.

'Literary critic Al Alvarez's autobiographical book *The Savage God* was a tudy of suicide, written after he tried to kill himself in 1960. . . . The book, which reads like an essay but is raw with emotional violence, rooted all the wide-ranging cultural references in a near-annihilating intensity of personal experience. Now, at 70, Alvarez has published a traditional autobiography, *Where Did It All Go Right?*, which is ostensibly a rounding out of what *The Savage God* began. By being so much more conventionally structured . . . the new book confirms that he is an intellectual, an essayist, more than a narrative or a descriptive writer. . . . The prose is meticulous and precise, and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

it is hard not to admire its unaffected clarity, but it lacks sensuality. . . . It is only when Alvarez starts to write about poetry and poets that the book comes to life."

Andrew Rissik. *Guardian Weekly,* Jan. 6–12, 2000: 14.

**Annenberg, Moses and Walter**

*Legacy: A Biography of Moses and Walter Annenberg.* Christopher Ogden. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999. 615 pp. $29.95. £25.00.

"It is obvious that Christopher Ogden, though he reveals family skeletons and tragedies, was ultimately dazzled by his long sojourn at the Annenberg castle. His tone is celebratory, at times apologetic, and reflects the loyal view from the servants' hall."

A. J. Sherman. *TLS,* Dec. 10, 1999: 36.

"'Legacy' is a masterfully crafted book, based solidly on extensive personal research. One would be hard-pressed to find a recent biography that plays so adroitly upon Americans' obsession with social mobility, wealth, and fame."

Peter Esmonde. *WP,* Sept. 6, 1999: 32–33.

**Arendt, Hannah**

*Le trésor perdu. Hannah Arendt et l'intelligence de l'action politique.* Etienne Tassin. Paris: Payot, "Critique de la politique," 1999. 594 pp. F195.

*Le souci du monde. Dialogue entre Hannah Arendt et quelques-uns de ses contemporains.* Sylvie Courtine-Denamy. Paris: Librarie philosophique J. Vrin, "Pour demain," 1999. 230 pp. F135.

Tassin's book is an intellectual biography (Arendt's path towards a philosophical understanding of the world of action), and Courtine-Denamy, while presenting Arendt's "dialogues"—direct or indirect—with people of her time (Jews or not, exiles or not, philosophers, etc.) touches on some aspects of her private life (exile; the necessity of expressing herself in a foreign language; the will to write, as a Jew, on any aspect of the Jewish question; the challenge of being present in the world when the world comes apart; the urgency of re-thinking everything anew). Both books, together with the increasing number of translations, symposiums, initiatives (and inventory of initiatives!), testify to the growing and justified interest in Arendt.

Roger-Pol Droit. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 8, 1999: 6.

**Armstrong, Louis**

*Louis Armstrong, In His Own Words: Selected Writings.* Ed. Thomas Brothers. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 255 pp. $25.00.

"The only thing wrong with 'Louis Armstrong, In His Own Words' is that

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


does not contain more letters and is not twice as long. The additional
icles listed in the appendix could easily fill a second volume."

Terry Teachout. *NYTBR,* Nov. 7, 1999: 27.

**'Aubign, Agrippa**

*grippa d'Aubign.* Madeleine Lazard. Paris: Fayard, 1998. 567 pp.
aving written biographies of Montaigne and Brantome, Lazard offers an
udite account of d'Aubign's tumultuous life. The portrait she traces is
at of an unshakable fighter for the Protestant cause, for whom the sword
d the pen were two weapons in the service of one cause.

Richard Crescenzo. *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 99.5 (1999): 1092–93.

**althus (Balthazar Klossowski)**

*althus: A Biography.* Nicholas Fox Weber. New York: Knopf, 1999. 644 pp. $40.00.

Balthus may not be God's gift to humanity, or to women. But by the end
f the book, he seems far more likable than his biographer."

Sarah Boxer. *NYTBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 10.

**emelmans, Ludwig**

*emelmans: The Life And Art of Madeline's Creator.* John Bemelmans Marciano. New York: Viking, 1999. 152 pp. $40.00.

Bemelmans died in 1962, before his grandson was born, but Marciano has
nployed oft-told stories from his mother's childhood, along with his
andfather's own writings to good effect. If there were moments when
emelmans had self-doubts or was less than a loving husband and jolly
ther, the reader will not find them here. The text is decidedly upbeat, and
e art, of course, sublimely so. Besides examples familiar to us all, we find
plethora of his less well remembered book and magazine illustrations,
urals and oils, as well as doodles, sketches and several comic strips. Like
banquet at the old Ritz-Carlton, this book is irresistible."

Edward Sorel. *NYTBR,* Dec. 5, 1999: 18.

**enzer, Seymour**

*Time, Love, Memory: A Great Biologist and His Quest for the Origins of Behavior.* Jonathan Weiner. New York: Knopf, 1999. 314 pp. $27.50.

Seymour Benzer is the most underappreciated of the founders of molecu-
ar biology. . . . [T]he work that should secure for Benzer a place in the pan-
heon of biology—his bridging the experimental gap between formal genet-
s and DNA structure—occupies only a dozen or so of the book's 300

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


pages. . . . The chief merit of *Time, Love, Memory* is its empathetic description—neither panegyric nor carping—of the remarkable personalities of the story's protagonist and his disciples."

Gunther S. Stent. *Science* 284, no. 5423 (June 25, 1999): 2096–97.

**Berlioz, Hector**

*Berlioz: Servitude and Greatness.* David Cairn. London: Penguin, 1999. 896 pp. £25.00.

"The second volume of David Cairn's monumental biography of Berlioz has taken 10 years to arrive, but it does not disappoint. Cairn is fully immersed in the Romantic world of Berlioz and his contemporaries. . . . This is not a technical musicological work, but one which evokes the music in terms understandable to the layman. . . . The sweep of the book is appropriately grand, and its subject lives especially through Cairn's copious quotation from Berlioz's correspondence."

David Horspool. *Guardian Weekly,* Dec. 16–22, 1999: 18.

**Berners, Lord**

*Lord Berners: The Last Eccentric.* Mark Amory. North Pomfret, VT: Pimlico/Trafalgar Square, 1998. 274 pp. $24.95.

"Though we might wish that Amory had pursued more of the many issues that Berners's abidingly strange story raises, we should nevertheless be grateful to him for an admirable job of research, bringing together the amazing carryings-on—and still more amazing variety of acquaintance—of a man whose leap from Victorian to modernist set him only partly free."

Angeline Goreau. *NYTBR,* Dec. 26, 1999: 22.

**Boswell, James**

*A Life of James Boswell.* Peter Martin. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999. 613 pp. £25.00.

"Martin's book is very much a retelling. . . . Eighteenth century Scotland can sometimes seem a little out of Martin's world. . . . This work has the qualities of an introduction to Boswell for those who have always wanted to know what he was like. . . . It is a readable and sensible book whose leading attraction is its respectful fondness for Boswell."

Karl Miller. *TLS,* Nov. 12, 1999: 3–4.

**Böttger, Johann Frederick**

*The Arcanum: The Extraordinary True Story.* Janet Gleeson. New York: Warner, 1999. 324 pp. $23.00.

"The story of Böttger's quest for the new arcanum, the formula for making

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


orcelain, is admirably told by Janet Gleeson, a British writer on antiques ho has worked for Sotheby's. Despite an annoying overuse of the passive oice, 'The Arcanum' reads fluidly and presents a full complement of char-cter types."

Ed Regis. *NYTBR,* Oct. 17, 1999: 33.

**rownmiller, Susan**

*Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution.* Susan Brownmiller. New York: Dial, 1999. 360 pp. Can$37.95.

usan Brownmiller writing on members of the feminist movement is like indulgent mother fondly remembering her girls' squabbles and tri-mphs, blaming their father for all their bratty, wild but idealistic trans-essions. . . . Pretty much all of us confident, sexually over-comfortable ceivers of the freedoms won by the women's movement look at Brown-iller and her crew as out-of-touch, prudish, sadsack liberals. Still, the thor of several fairly successful books, Brownmiller is doing much better an the vast majority of her sisters who, after dedicating themselves for 10 r 20 years to the movement, ended up poor, unthanked and forgotten. hat's your reward for being utopian."

Lisa Carver. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 1, 2000: D19.

**ush, George W.**

*irst Son: George W. Bush and the Bush Family Dynasty.* Bill Minutaglio. New York: Times Books/Random House, 1999. 371 pp. $25.00.

Minutaglio, a reporter with The Dallas Morning News, traces the way ush's career mimicked and often parodies his father's: Andover, Yale, ight school, the oil business, politics. He declines to pry into the drug mors and emphasizes instead the way all members of the Bush dynasty hare a common set of values."

David Brooks. *NYTBR,* Oct. 17, 1999: 4.

ND *W: Revenge of the Bush Dynasty.* Elizabeth Mitchell. New York: Hyperion, 1999. 370 pp. $22.95.

*hrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush.* Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose. New York: Random House, 1999. 179 pp. $19.95.

*Charge to Keep.* George W. Bush. New York: Morrow, 1999. 253 pp. $23.00.

Of these four books, the biographies by Minutaglio and Mitchell are xcellent, especially when we consider that their subject would be hard put o complete a legitimate full-page resume without padding it. Bush's auto-iography, written by his communications director, Karen Hughes, is a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


slapdash affair, filled with homilies about love and family while never acknowledging all the benefactors who have greased Bush's way through life. It contains many excerpts from his speeches and is strewn with compliments to the various people he has named to government office. For all their cold-eyed scrutiny, Ivins, Mitchell, and Minutaglio do a better job of making Bush seem like a human being than his own autobiography does."

Lars-Erik Nelson. *NYRB,* Feb. 24, 2000: 4.

**Byron, Lord**

*Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame.* Benita Eisler. London: Viking, 1999. 837 pp. $35.00. £25.00.

"There are far too many factual errors in this book. Ultimately more disturbing, however, than such howlers as the ascription to Caroline Lamb of the lines of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh,* to Bulwer-Lytton of Disraeli's novel *Vivian Grey,* the confusion of the poet Horace with the Horatii brothers, her invention of a Hamlet 'accused by visions of his two victims,' or a King Lear given to mad songs, is the consistent way Eisler distorts the circumstances of Byron's life and poetry—invariably to his discredit. Nothing is too trivial to escape her hostility."

Anne Barton. *NYRB,* Nov. 18, 1999: 46.

"What could essentially have been a good overview of Byron's life is distorted by Eisler's attempts to spice her confection with scandal. There is an eagerness to read the worst into Byron's actions. In every personal encounter he is cast as a villain."

Anne Fleming. *TLS,* Nov. 5, 1999: 21.

**Callas, Maria**

*Maria Callas, Sacred Monster.* Stelio Galatopoulos. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 564 pp. $35.00.

"Although Galatopoulos charts out the outline of Callas' career in detail, discussion of the development of her artistic personality and her musical achievement overall is less successful. . . . Fortunately, through the book's extensive documentation a picture of Callas' remarkable achievement does emerge. A significant feature is an annotated discography of recordings of complete operas, recitals, pirated performance tapes, master classes (collectors beware: no catalogue numbers are provided either for LP recordings or CD reissues), as well as a list of video recordings. The summary of performances and more than 100 photos of productions from 1947 to 1965 are of documentary value."

Mario R. Mercado. *Opera News,* Sept. 1999: 117.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**arrey, Jim**

*e Joker is Wild: The Trials and Triumphs of Jim Carrey.* Martin Knelman. New York: Viking, 1999. 230 pp. Can$32.00.

he career facts are all there, but Knelman only lets us peek through the holes of Carrey's two failed marriages. . . . [T]he book resembles more a résumé than the juicy tell-all we expected. Most readers want to see the adkill on the highway to stardom. How else can we understand what otivates and compels performers to reach beyond that flickering spotlight a dingy basement comedy club?"

Glenda Fordham. *Globe and Mail,* Nov. 20, 1999: D22–23.

**arter, Rubin**

*urricane: The Miraculous Journey of Rubin Carter.* James S. Hirsch. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. 358 pp. Can$36.00.

Disciplined and focused throughout, Hirsch shows a fine mastery in posing the contradictions of a clique that has dined out for years on their e of liberating Carter from his hellish prison life. . . . Hirsch's research s clearly exhaustive. His writing is focused and literate. Moreover, despite arter having collaborated in the self-described 'authorized biography,' the thor appears to have pulled very few punches."

Kirk Makin. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 15, 2000: D16.

**hambers, Whittaker**

*Whittaker Chambers: A Biography.* Sam Tanenhaus. New York: Random House, 1997. 638 pp. $35.00.

For years, the Alger Hiss case has commanded the attention of scholars cause of its impact on the politics of the World War II era. . . . His main accuser and protagonist, Whittaker Chambers, is the subject of Tanenhaus's biography, the first work on Chambers since the latter's autobiography, *Witness,* in 1952. Tanenhaus, a freelance journalist, has written a welcome study—one that tells us much about the Communist party in America, postwar liberalism, and Hiss."

James N. Giglio. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (Mar. 2000): 207–209.

**hateaubriand, Vicomte François Auguste-René de**

*Chateaubriand: Biographie morale et intellectuelle.* Jean-Paul Clément. Paris: Flammarion, 1998. 699 pp.

Clément is the director of the Maison Chateaubriand de la Valle-aux-Loups, nd as such not only has access to interesting documents but has a profound nowledge of his subject matter. Clément, a political historian, writes a iography which is moral and intellectual as well as political and historical.

Pierre Campion. *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 99.5 (1999): 1111.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Churchill, Winston**

*Churchill.* François Bédarida. Paris: Fayard, 1999. 576 pp. F160.

"The reader will find in this book neither new documents nor archivist's discoveries" warns the author. No surprise after the eight volumes of Randolph Churchill and Martin Gilbert. Facing this challenge, Bédarida's great merit is to have written a synthesis: not only a lively, elegant narrative, but a lesson in historical method and a deep reflection on British identity and on twentieth century European democracies.

Robert Frank. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 22, 1999: 9.

**Clark, Jim**

*The New New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story.* Michael Lewis. New York: Norton, 1999. 268 pp. $25.95.

"It is a splendid, entirely satisfactory book, intelligent and fun and revealing and troubling in the correct proportions, resolutely skeptical but not at all cynical, brimming with fabulous scenes as well as sharp analysis."

Kurt Anderson. *NYTBR,* Oct. 21, 1999: 10–12.

"Lewis tries to illustrate various points about Clark and his companies, but his sloppiness with [the numbers] destroys the book's credibility. In a way, 'The New New Thing' resembles the strategies of a second-rate Internet company: hastily build something from a seemingly plausible idea, sell it to a credulous public as quickly as you can, and make your millions."

David Streitfield. *WP,* Nov. 15, 1999: 33.

**Clinton, Hilary**

*Hilary's Choice.* Gail Sheehy. New York: Random House, 1999. 389 pp. Can$36.95.

"Sheehy's biography stands above the others . . . the research is impeccable and organized skillfully. It's well written. It rises above its salacious material to take a supremely gifted woman very seriously. . . . When you read this book, it's impossible not to be reminded that Sheehy's fame rests more with her three bestselling *Passages* books, on the various stages of adult life, than it does on her political non-fiction."

Stevie Cameron. *Globe and Mail,* Dec. 18, 1999: D12.

**Cole, Nat "King"**

*Nat King Cole.* Daniel Mark Epstein. New York: Fararr, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 438 pp. $27.00. Can$43.00.

"One is hard-pressed to decide when Epstein is at his worst. Is it when he swan-dives into torrents of overwrought rhapsodic prose? When he presumes to describe Cole's thoughts in private moments? Or when he is ploddingly

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


ite, which is often, as in the statement that Nat 'was fit to be tied'? . . . o, he is at his worst when he affects knowledge of music. . . . His ignonce is appalling."

Gene Lees. *Globe and Mail,* Feb. 5, 2000: D6–7.

Daniel Mark Epstein's biography 'Nat King Cole' gives us the most comete accounting yet of all the Coles who add up to a musical king. He is ot angry about what many have seen as a turn from jazz purity to pop omiscuity in the 1950's. He is not out to make a particular case for one pect of the life and work. He is out to make sense (personal, social, and usical) of a man the American imagination turned into more than just nother popular artist and entertainer. Epstein, a poet, playwright and ographer, does not do it in fine prose (his images and adjectives are overrought), but he keeps the story bouncing along with plenty of vigor, and makes room for voices of people who knew Cole and were of his time."

Margo Jefferson. *NYTBR,* Dec. 26, 1999: 5.

**olette**

*crets of the Flesh: A Life of Colette.* Judith Thurman. New York: Knopf, 1999. 592 pp. $30.00.

n spite of its title, 'Secrets of the Flesh,' by Judith Thurman, is a fine and telligent biography of Colette, with her long tumultuous life and the reat body of work scrupulously considered and presented with style."

Mavis Gallant. *NYTBR,* Oct. 17, 1999: 12–13.

**ooke, Alistair**

*listair Cooke: The Biography.* Nick Clarke. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999. 548 pp. £20.00.

There is little of Cooke's celebratory incandescence in Clarke's prose. But e is a masterly dissector of his subject's unnerving neutralities. . . . Clarke as uncovered part of the riddle of the Blackpool sands and revealed a soliary eminence."

Hywel Williams. *TLS,* Nov. 19, 1999: 30.

**oolidge, Calvin**

*The Presidency of Calvin Coolidge.* Robert H. Ferrell. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1998. 272 pp. $29.95.

Ferrell, the author of more than three dozen books on American political istory, seeks to reevaluate the Coolidge administration despite the ironic lliance of liberal historians who caricature Coolidge as complacent, lazy, umorless, hostile to progressivism and devoted to materialism and busiess, and conservative revisionists who celebrate Coolidge as a mossbacked

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


antitax, antigovernment ideologue. By simply taking Coolidge seriously and scrutinizing the evidence, Ferrell demonstrates that they are both wrong." Sheldon M. Stern. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29.3 (Sept. 1999): 730–32.

**Cooper, Douglas**

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Picasso, Provence, and Douglas Cooper.* John Richardson. New York: Knopf, 1999. 318 pp. $26.95. £20.00.

"Temperamentally, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice,* by art critic and Picasso biographer John Richardson . . . has the giddy effervescence of a Fellini film. . . . There is also a sane and admirable sense that you can't and shouldn't make life too abstract: that we are put on this earth to eat, drink, talk and make love. What the book isn't, frustratingly, is anything much more than an entertainment."

Andrew Rissik. *Guardian Weekly,* Jan. 6–12, 2000: 14.

"*The Sorcerer's Apprentice* . . . is a many-layered book. As a come-on, this may be seductive. But it leaves out the central fact about the book—which is that it is really a freeform autobiography. It is to English memoirs of the postwar years what Alfred de Musset's *Confession d'un enfant du siècle* was for France in 1836. . . . Picasso is certainly on stage for much of the second half of book, and the reader has a front-row seat. Provence is a continual presence from the moment that Cooper and Richardson saw, fell in love with, and bought the spectacular Chateau de Castille near Avignon. And Douglas Cooper? He is the wild card that at any moment may cause joy or havoc, or both at the same time."

John Russell. *NYRB,* Dec. 2, 1999: 6.

**Cooper, Gary**

*Gary Cooper Off Camera: A Daughter Remembers.* Maria Cooper Janis. New York: Abrams, 1999. 176 pp. $35.00.

"[This book] is an inviting photo album-scrapbook-reminiscence that contains irresistible black-and-white photographs of the actor on almost every page. . . . I can't, however, help but wonder if Janis is a misguided soul who has fallen for a publicity department's puffery, a dupe of her father's grandiosity, or if Cooper was what she describes and she the saint of forgiveness. We will never know in this paean to her father's goodness."

Diane Leslie. *LATBR,* Dec. 19, 1999: 6.

**Coppola, Francis Ford**

*Francis Ford Coppola: A Filmmaker's Life.* Michael Schumacher. New York: Crown, 1999. 536 pp. $30.00.

"Michael Schumacher's [book] is a real disappointment. A dead giveaway

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


. the author's effusive expression of gratitude to the director in the very st sentence of the acknowledgments . . . followed by the alarming admis- on that the author submitted his manuscript to the subject for review hile still maintaining that 'this is not an authorized biography in the tra- itional sense.' . . . The author doesn't even pretend to understand the ner life of the man upon whom he lavishes 524 pages, and who knows w many years of work. For the most part, he is content to skate across e placid surface of the already known."

Peter Biskind. *LATBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 6.

Michael Schumacher's workmanlike but uninspired biography assembles wealth of data about the mercurial filmmaker's life and career, much of it erly familiar, without resolving . . . fundamental issues."

Joseph McBride. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 42.

**uny, Fred**

*he Man Who Tried to Save the World: The Dangerous Life and Mysterious Disappearance of Fred Cuny.* Scott Anderson. New York: Doubleday, 1999. 374 pp. $24.95.

The haunting, agonizingly elusive question of what precisely became of red Cuny . . . comes to dominate and almost overwhelm Scott Anderson's eticulous and absorbing new book. . . . Anderson's account is mainly bout Cuny's disappearance; Cuny's remarkable, inventive life is relegated little more than one hundred efficient if inevitably cramped pages near e beginning."

Lawrence Weschler. *NYRB,* Dec. 2, 1999: 33.

**ustine, Adolphe de**

*Taste for Freedom: The Life of Adolphe de Custine.* Anka Muhlstein. Translated from French by Teresa Waugh. Chappaqua, NY: Helen Marx Books, 1999. 391 pp. $16.95.

. . . the terms of the traditional [life and times] formula have been torn part. The amateurs have seized on the lives, pulling in one direction, while e professionals have held fast to the times and tugged in the other. Anka uhlstein belongs to the amateurs. She makes no pretense to a profession- command of all the complexities of European history during Custine's fe, which extended from 1790 to 1857, spanning three revolutions, two onarchies, two republics, and two empires. . . . One quality that makes for uccess in this kind of writing is pace. Where an academic historian would ause over details, piling on material from fresh sources and arguing with e historiography, Muhlstein plunges ahead, carrying the reader with her. he documents all key points, so she never requires anyone to take anything n faith; but she moves fast and shows a great talent for selecting pertinent

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


anecdotes and quotations. They can be culled everywhere from the vast production of memoirs and correspondence in the early nineteenth century. But most readers require a guide to take them through this material, someone who can lead them past the idle chatter to the most revealing evidence. Muhlstein does the job deftly and without wasting a word."

Robert Darnton. *NYRB,* Feb. 10, 2000: 14.

**Debord, Guy**

*Correspondance 1957–1960 (Tome I).* Guy Debord. Paris: Fayard, 1999. 280 pp. F160.

What is striking in this first volume of correspondence is the sense of urgency and the political lucidity of the author of "La Société du spectacle," which are inseparable from his passion for poetry ("A man is defined by what he means, practically, by poetry; therefore, by what he contents himself with under this name").

Philippe Sollers. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 15, 1999: 1.

**Debs, Eugene Victor**

*Harp Song for a Radical: The Life of Eugene Victor Debs.* Marguerite Young. Ed. Charles Ruas. New York: Knopf, 1999. 599 pp. $35.00.

"At the time of her death, the manuscript ran to more than 2,000 pages, and Young had only barely reached the strike Debs led in 1894 against the Pullman Car Company. 'Harp Song for a Radical' has been published at a more manageable 599 pages—a rather extreme pruning, and one that raises questions about its resemblance to its original. Still, the editor, Charles Ruas, has respected the voraciously expansive nature of Young's writing instead of zeroing in on a central narrative."

Adam Shantz. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 21.

**Desnos, Robert**

*Robert Desnos: Le roman d'une vie (1900–1945).* Dominique Desanti. Paris: Mercure de France, 1999. 366 pp. F135.

*Oeuvres.* Robert Desnos. Edition established by Marie-Claire Dumas. Paris: Gallimard, "Quarte," 1999. 1,400 pp. F170.

At 15, Desnos knew he was a poet "in aeternum." For a while in the surrealist movement, he gradually grew away from it, and rediscovered the traditional fixed forms of poetry. He died at the age of 45, not having survived the horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Then began his legend. These two books, not easy to categorize (Dumas' is supposed to be a "work-life" and Desanti's a "roman vrai"), may help restore him to his true figure.

Hector Bianciotti. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 1, 1999: 5.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**iana, Princess of Wales**

*iana, in Search of Herself: Portrait of a Troubled Princess.* Sally Bedell Smith. New York: Times Books, 1999. 451 pp. $25.00.

. . even though one might have wished that Smith had taken her time d the book had come out on the third anniversary of Diana's death, it is important achievement. Smith has done an impressive job of winnow- g fact from fiction."

Charlotte Hays. *WP,* Sept. 13, 1999: 33.

**ickey, James**

*rux: The Letters of James Dickey.* Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman. New York: Knopf, 1999. 574 pp. $35.00.

A few years ago, the publication of Philip Larkin's letters dented his rep- ation by revealing the poet's vicious streak. Dickey's letters expose some- ing worse: under all the chest hair, he was a hollow man. The editors have one him a further disservice. Their book is carefully annotated; there is a uiverful of (not invariably accurate) footnotes at the back. But the rest has een poorly assembled."

J. D. McClatchy. *NYTBR,* Dec. 19, 1999: 18.

**ionne Quintuplets**

*he Dionnes.* Ellie Tesher. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1999. 324 pp. Can$34.95.

*The Dionnes* . . . unravels the often conflicting and occasionally confusing ories of world-famous 'miracles' Emilie, Marie, Yvonne, Cécile and nnette, the first quintuplets born of one egg to survive into adulthood in pre-fertility-drug era. . . . Tesher's volume is an illuminating chronicle of e family's life-long struggle for autonomy and independence, and an tute anatomy of a peculiarly Canadian strain of self-serving timidity flicting both politicians and journalists (chronically slow to catch on). . . . he latter third of *The Dionnes* focuses almost exclusively on the struggles r justice undertaken by the true hero of this continuing drama, Cécile's on, Bertrand, who attacked the Ontario government for treating the girls s a circus act, which 'left them ill-prepared for ordinary life'; they lived in drafty house and hadn't enough money to pay for their prescriptions."

Judith Fitzgerald. *Globe and Mail,* Nov. 13, 1999: D13.

**urrell, Gerald**

*erald Durrell: The Authorized Biography.* Douglas Botting. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1999. 644 pp. $19.95. Can$29.95.

Botting does an excellent job of giving us Durrell the man, not merely the egend. Here he is having a *grand mal* seizure, possibly alcohol-induced;

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

here he is wildly wooing [Lee McGeorge, whom he married in 1979]; here he is with Princess Anne (whom he calls Annie Girl), patron of his zoo; exploding with frustration at his board of directors; eating far too much, as usual, at his villa in the south of France."

Caitlin Kelly. *Globe and Mail,* Nov. 20, 1999: D18.

"There is rich material for a biography in all this, and as Durrell's authorized biographer, Douglas Botting, the author of a book about German naturalist and explorer, Alexander von Humbolt, seems to have had access to his subject's most private papers. Unfortunately, the many quotations from Durrell himself serve mainly to remind us how far Botting falls short of Durrell's voice as a storyteller."

Richard Coniff. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 24–25.

**Earhart, Amelia**

*Amelia Earhart: The Mystery Solved.* Elgen M. Long and Marie K. Long. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 320 pp. $25.00.

"'Amelia Earhart: The Mystery Solved' by Elgen M. Long, the first person to fly solo around the world over both poles, and his wife, Marie, a former public relations consultant, plods through the life and last days of Earhart, who disappeared in 1937 during her attempt to circle the world. The author's intent is to recreate Earhart's life, career and death without taking 'poetic license,' a noble enterprise to be sure but one that turns dull rather quickly."

Andrea Higbie. *NYTBR,* Jan. 2, 2000: 15.

**Einstein, Lieserl**

*Einstein's Daughter: The Search for Lieserl.* Michele Zackheim. New York: Riverhead, 1999. 301 pp. $26.95.

"The fate of Albert Einstein's illegitimate daughter has been shrouded since her existence was established in 1986, though the prevailing belief holds that Lieserl was put up for adoption as a baby. In 'Einstein's Daughter,' the novelist Michele Zackheim contends instead that Lieserl died young from complications related to scarlet fever. Zackheim lumbers toward this plausible and decidedly anticlimactic conclusion in a poorly organized, highly speculative and somewhat self-righteous account of Lieserl's life and death."

Sara Ivry. *NYTBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 21.

**Farrell, J. G.**

*J. G. Farrell: The Making of a Writer.* Lavinia Greacen. London: Bloomsbury, 1999. 428 pp. £25.00.

"This is an admirable biography. Greacen has been given access to family

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


ters and diaries . . . and she remains calmly sympathetic, calling in exact- the right way on the reader's admiration and pity."

Penelope Fitzgerald. *TLS,* Oct. 8, 1999: 27.

**laubert, Gustave**

*ustave Flaubert: Correspondances IV (1869–1875).* Ed. Jean Bruneau. Paris: Gallimard, 1998.

his volume of letters covers seven years of Flaubert's life, and traces the isis of the author in his fifties, having to face the poor reception of his *'éducation sentimentale,* his mother's death, the war, a new political era, his ar of aging, the break with his editor, and his niece's husband's bank- uptcy.

eanne Bem. *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 99.5 (1999): 1114–16.

**ord, John**

*rint the Legend: The Life and Times of John Ford.* Scott Eyman. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 656 pp. $40.00.

'Print the Legend' makes all previous books on Ford, and most books on ny other filmmaker, seem undernourished. Eyman . . . has given us a 600- lus-page book without an ounce of fat. In fact, considering the size and cope of his subject, 'Print the Legend' almost seems pared down."

Allen Barra. *LATBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 7.

**rancis of Assisi**

*aint François d'Assise.* Jacques Le Goff. Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque des Histoires," 1999. 224 pp. F120.

n this collection of four essays on the Poverello, the second alone pertains o biography. But it is radiant biography. Beyond the expected account of t. Francis' travels and sermons, vision and revelation, we are shown, in ixty pages or so, the absolute uniqueness of his mystical journey, the quest or "a great respiration between apostolate amongst men and regeneration n and through solitude."

Philippe-Jean Catinchi. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 8, 1999: 7.

**ry, Roger**

*La Vie de Roger Fry* [Roger Fry]. Virginia Woolf. Translated from English by Jean Pavans. Paris: Payot, 1999. 314 pp. F139.

Roger Fry was an eminent art critic and historian, who influenced English painting by advocating post-impressionism. His life by Woolf reaches France only now. It is rather a biographical novel, but written by Woolf.

Christine Jordis. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 8, 1999: 4.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Galilei, Galileo.** See **Suor Maria Celeste.**

**Gama, Vasco da**

*The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama.* Sanjay Subrahmanyam. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. 400 pp. $19.95.

"Subrahmanyam's objectives are to reinterpret the career of Gama, reexamine the historical contexts of the first voyage, to place him in the broader historical environments of Portugal and Asia, and to 'make an implicit plea for a rather more nuanced, indeed ironical, look at the history of European expansion . . . and the outward-looking processes by which Europeans sought to redefine the commercial and political networks of the early sixteenth century."

A. J. R. Russell-Wood. *Journal of World History* 10.2 (Fall 1999): 452–57.

**Gell-Mann, Murray**

*Strange Beauty: Murray Gell-Mann and the Revolution in Twentieth-Century Physics.* George Johnson. New York: Knopf, 1999. 446 pp. $30.00.

"'Strange Beauty' is not a puff piece. Johnson makes no attempt to hide Gell-Mann's relentless insecurity, debilitating perfectionism and abrasive manner. He appears as a flawed, almost Shakespearean, hero in an era when prominent physicists like Einstein, Richard Feynman and Stephen Hawking are typically portrayed as comic-book heroes."

Louis A. Bloomfield. *NYTBR,* Oct. 17, 1999: 8.

"[My] recollections illustrate aspects that are recurring themes in *Strange Beauty,* a biography by science writer George Johnson—the breadth and diversity of Murray's activities and erudition, his aversion to criticism, and his need for recognition of his accomplishments, which are many. . . . Johnson's portrait of Gell-Mann strikes an appropriate balance, reflecting admiration without undue adulation. A second function is to enhance public understanding of science, and a third is to contribute to the history of science. On all three counts, I found myself awarding high marks in the first half of the book and becoming somewhat disappointed toward the end of it."

Mary K. Gaillard. *Science* 286, no. 5540 (Oct. 22, 1999): 687.

**Gide, Andre**

*Andre Gide: Le Messager.* Pierre Lepape. Paris: Seuil, 1998. 501 pp. F139.

*Andre Gide ou la Vocation du Bonheur.* Claude Martin. Vol. 1: *1869–1911.* Paris: Fayard, 1999. 699 pp. F180.

"In 83 short chapters, Lepape traces the course of Gide's life from start to finish. His aim was not to provide a full biography of Gide, but rather to

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


apture and define his elusive presence. The great merit of Lepape's study es in his recognition of the importance Gide attributed to the autonomy f literature throughout his life. Martin condenses huge masses of material nto an eminently readable and coherent narrative."

Peter Fawcett. *TLS,* Nov. 12, 1999: 4–6.

**Glasgow, Ellen**

*Ellen Glasgow: A Biography.* Susan Goodman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999. 308 pp. $34.95.

"Susan Goodman's conscientious new biography isn't likely to inspire much new interest, but it does have a fascinatingly peculiar and painful story to tell."

Hermione Lee. *NYRB,* Dec. 16, 1999: 60.

**Greene, Graham**

*Greene on Capri: A Memoir.* Shirley Hazzard. New York: Virago, 1999. 160 pp. $22.00. Aus$29.95.

"The third and final volume of Greene's authorized biography by Norman Sherry is due later this year. Amid howling winds of hype, Shirley Hazzard modestly hopes 'there is room for the remembrances of someone who knew him—not wisely, perhaps, but fairly well.' . . . Her memoir . . . is a pointilist masterpiece that manages to evoke a magical setting, remarkable people, and vivid events, all in the space of 138 elegantly written pages."

Michael Mewshaw. *LATBR,* Feb. 6, 2000: 4–5.

"Graham Greene has so far contrived to elude the best, and worst, efforts of his biographers. Norman Sherry's inflated work . . . is relentlessly detailed but provides more clues than answers. Michael Shelden's sharper, nastier book did not add up to a rounded study. Now, a novelist who knew him as a friend for the last 30 years of his life shows us how in biography, as elsewhere, less can be more. Shirley Hazzard is highly observant and alarmingly intelligent; she is also erudite, precise and morally scrupulous. Her short book is not only a joy to read for its lucid, thoughtful prose, but also a refreshing antidote to biographical overkill and presumption. As a picture of Greene, it is like an Ingres portrait drawing: small, but miraculously clear."

Anne Chisholm. *Weekend Australian,* Feb. 19–20, 2000: 11.

**Gwathmey, Robert**

*Robert Gwathmey: The Life and Art of a Passionate Observer.* Michael Kammen. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999. 240 pp. $24.95.

"Kammen, a social historian, is most effective at positioning Gwathmey in his cultural frame. . . . He established artistic connections between

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Gwathmey and the French realists. . . . Kammen is less persuasive in evaluating Gwathmey's art, preferring, for example, to speak of the paintings of the 40's and early '50's as his 'best known' rather than simply as his best art, which they assuredly are."

John Beardsley. *NYTBR,* Oct. 17, 1999: 16.

**Hadrian**

*Hadrian: The Restless Emperor.* Anthony Birley. New York: Routledge, 1999. 399 pp. $50.00.

"There has been until now no adequate modern biography of Hadrian; this is strange, especially when one remembers how much the age of Hadrian and the Antonines has in common with that in which we are now living. . . . But now we are fortunate enough to have an up-to-date biography of high quality by a learned member of a remarkable family of scholars. . . . His command of the ancient evidence for the life of Hadrian appears to be complete, and his firm grasp of the complicated history of the whole relevant period is impressive."

Hugh Lloyd-Jones. *NYRB,* Dec. 2, 1999: 54.

**Hamilton, Alexander**

*Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government.* Karl-Friedrich Walling. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1999. 356 pp. $35.00.

"Alexander Hamilton was never president of the United States, but he had more influence on the character and development of the presidency than most of its officeholders. Walling claims that Hamilton was 'the most important Founder of the modern presidency.' (p. 153) In one of the most subtle and accurate studies of Hamilton to date, Walling paints a complex portrait of Hamilton's theory of modern republican government."

David Nicholas. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (Mar. 2000): 209–211.

**Havel, Vaclav**

*Vaclav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts.* John Keane. London: Bloomsbury, 1999. 532 pp. £25.00.

"This is a bad book . . . horribly overwritten, absurdly pompous. . . . [I]t tells us a great deal that we don't need to know, while omitting a great deal that we do."

Timothy Garton Ash. *TLS,* Dec. 10, 1999: 3–4.

**Hershey, Milton**

*The Emperors of Chocolate: Inside the Secret World of Hershey and Mars.* Joël Glenn Brenner. New York: Random House, 1999. 366 pp. $25.95.

"Brenner could have had a little help with the organization of 'The

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


mperors of Chocolate'; in trying to tell such a far-reaching story she takes
any detours and sometimes has to labor mightily to get back on track.
ut that is a minor quibble. At the outset she tells us that the story of Mars
nd Hershey will be 'a history of America, as told through its sweet tooth.'
er book comes close to living up to that grandiloquent promise."

Judith Newman. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 47–49.

**olroyd, Michael**

*asil Street Blues.* Michael Holroyd. London: Little, Brown, 1999. 306 pp. £17.50.

Holroyd has something moving to say about human nature and the iminishing, self-destructive patterns into which most of us are compelled watch our lives being shaped by events. Perhaps this is because he is a talist at heart and believes in the inevitability of failure, or at least the fail-re of most of our grander hopes and pretensions. . . . The lesson of *Basil treet Blues* is that in the end we all come crashing down. As Holroyd nderstands, all that's left to meet the indignities of age, time and physical mpoverishment is a kind of hard-headed, unsentimental kindness: the bility to see our families clearly, and to appreciate them for what they are, ot what they wanted or pretended to be. There is little verbal poetry in the ook, but it has unusual warmth and real psychological generosity and dis-inction."

Andrew Rissik. *Guardian Weekly,* Jan. 6–12, 2000: 14.

**ames, Harry**

*rumpet Blues: The Life of Harry James.* Peter J. Levinson. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 333 pp. $30.00.

Peter J. Levinson knew James for more than two decades, working with im as an agent, and dining and drinking with him as a friend. However, is biography of James is relentlessly candid. On the negative side, it is xhaustingly complete in its recounting of James's career. The result is a ook that will be of interest primarily to big band aficionados."

George Robinson. *NYTBR,* Dec. 19, 1999: 23.

**ames, Henry**

*Henry James: A Life in Letters.* Ed. Philip Horne. New York: Viking, 1999. 668 pp. $35.00.

What Horne, an English journalist, manages to till so exquisitely is the fallow ground between stark letter collections that leave readers more or less to their own devices and interpretive-heavy literary biographies. As he suggests, 'Henry James: A Life in Letters' seeks to revive the elegant Victorian genre of 'life and letters.' Thus he heads each missive with a beautifully

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

written, informative vignette that not only immediately puts the page-hopping reader in the proper context but also helps to form a continuing but unobtrusive narrative."

Renee Tursi. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 21.

**Jarrell, Randall**

*Remembering Randall: A Memoir of Poet, Critic, and Teacher Randall Jarrell.* Mary von Schrader Jarrell. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 173 pp. $22.00.

"*Remembering Randall* is an affectionate memoir which feels like a set of fragments of a longer work, a fuller biography. There are chapters on, among other topics, 'Ideas and Poems,' 'Libraries,' 'Washington,' 'Faust: Part I,' with anecdotes and reflections arranged in roughly chronological order, except for the last chapter, which traces the whole relationship of husband and wife from their meeting to his death, including what she describes as 'our bewildering phase toward the end.'"

Michael Wood. *NYRB,* Dec. 2, 1999: 43.

**Jefferson, Thomas**

*Thomas Jefferson's Journey to the South of France.* Roy and Alma Moore. New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999. 160 pp. $29.95.

"Jefferson's words are balanced by the Moores' photographs of the sites and cities Jefferson visited. There is a charming, informative introduction by Lucia C. Stanton, a historian at Monticello. The book, however, makes no pretension to scholarship. There isn't an index, for example, and some of the recipients of Jefferson's letters are cursorily identified. The photographs seldom show people, which makes sense; even so, there is something predictable about them. The juxtaposition of period prints and maps and modern-day photographs is effective, however. This book is a simple and easy introduction to this dazzling interlude in Jefferson's life."

Richard Goodman. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 21.

**John Paul II**

*Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II.* George Weigel. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 992 pp. $35.00.

AND IN FRENCH: *Jean-Paul II, témoin de l'espérance.* Trans. by Philippe Bonnet, Sabine Boulongue, Valérie Rosier, and Floriane Vidal. Paris: Jean-Claude Lattés, 1999. 1,200 pp. F198.

"[Weigel's] nearly 1,000-page book 'Witness to Hope,' opens a window into John Paul's priestly formation, spirituality and writings that is essential in understanding the underlying religious ethos that has propelled this remarkable pontiff onto the world stage and in the process made him a

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


oral superpower. . . . This book is an apologia. Weigel is more than porter, more than biographer. He is an unabashed advocate, a pleader of e papal cause, a champion of the Holy Father and explicator of papal pro-uncements. . . . No other popular biographer has ventured as exegete nd apologist) into the intellectual thicket of closely reasoned and finely uanced papal pronouncements in order to make them more readily nderstood. . . . 'Witness to History' is a meticulously researched book that certain to become a benchmark for future inquiries into the life and times Pope John Paul II."

Larry B. Stammer, *LATBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 3–4.

n authorized biography cannot escape hagiography. But having benefited om exceptional working opportunities, it will enjoy in the future the sta-s of Memoirs, or of a will. In it the intimate portrait is to be found next the chronicle of the years, the relation of trips and diplomatic games ad-ins theological arguments, the whole being interspersed with occasional sty or even hilarious anecdotes. Weigel's book is and will be an indispen-ible document. But by focusing it on the man (admittedly a visionary iant), the risk is great to eliminate the catholic people and the catholic insti-ution—so much weakened here and there in these last twenty years. For he paradox is: the more the Pope of Rome pushes forward his own role at orld level, the more he reduces the chances for Christian unity.

Henri Tincq. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 15, 1999: 7.

**ohnson, Claudia Alta Taylor ("Lady Bird")**

*ady Bird: A Biography of Mrs. Johnson.* Jan Jarboe Russell. New York: Lisa Drew/Scribner, 1999. 350 pp. $26.00.

Despite conducting nearly 80 personal interviews, including a number ith Mrs. Johnson, as well as conducting extensive research, Russell, a con-ibuting editor at Texas Monthly, fails to elucidate her subject. She lauds Mrs. Johnson for her feminist outlook and environmental activism, but the eader has little empathy with her."

Julia Douglas. *NYTBR,* Oct. 31, 1999: 24.

**ohnson, Lyndon**

*yndon Johnson and the Great Society.* John A. Andrew III. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998. 224 pp. $12.95.

John A. Andrew III sets out to correct the distortions coming from both he political Right and Left of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society egislation. Focusing on 'the underlying ideas and principal objectives of he original Great Society legislation', Andrew briefly but fairly recon-tructs that turbulent and heady moment of American liberalism."

H. Warren Gardner. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29.3 (Sept. 1999): 721.

CC-0. Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Joyce, James**

*James Joyce.* Edna O'Brien. New York: Lipper-Viking/Penguin, 1999. 179 pp. $19.95. Can$27.99.

"O'Brien sketches a complex, wry man whose relationship with Ireland was 'the most incensed and yet the most meditative' of all the nation's writers. She explores the works of that man with exceptional ardour, focussing again and again on his allegiance to the demands of language, the rigours of scoring a cacophonous world as a smooth prose melody, because that is where his genius ultimately lies. . . . *James Joyce* is pitched at a mid-career Joycean tone. Sentence after sentence dazzles with its density and perfect music. Irish English . . . is celebrated by being tossed about, made fun of, openly adored. The text reads like a boozy, competitive chat between two mutual, and self-admiring literary titans. . . . Joyce would have admired her audacity and, recognizing the monster of her gift, counselled her to do whatever it took to produce the work. Even if that meant reading and writing yourself blind."

Charles Foran. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 1, 2000: D17.

"The facts of Joyce's life are well-known by now, and O'Brien has nothing new to add to them. That was not her intention. No doubt the aim of the series in general is to attract a large number of readers by unexpected conjunctions of subject and author. As the publisher interestingly has it, 'The Penguin Lives series pairs celebrated writers with famous individuals who have shaped our thinking,' a statement that requires a moment's thought to unravel: after all, both Edna O'Brien and James Joyce are 'celebrated writers' and 'famous individuals.' While O'Brien's book looks and feels like a skillfully potted biography that will easily fit the pocket or briefcase, it is also in its sly way a meditation on the splendors and miseries of the literary life, as she herself has known them."

John Banville. *NYRB,* Dec. 16, 1999: 48.

**Kaufman, Andy**

*Andy Kaufman Revealed! Best Friend Tells All.* Bob Zmuda and Matthew Scott Hansen. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999. 306 pp. $21.00.

"Other than hinting at the possibility that Kaufman may have exhibited characteristics of multiple personality disorder, Zmuda does not shed much new light on Kaufman's eccentric behavior. Still, though lacking much insight into the man himself, Zmuda has composed an often hilarious tribute to his best friend that does reveal many of this master trickster's secrets."

Lance Gould. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 21.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


*ND Lost in the Funhouse: The Life and Mind of Andy Kaufman.* William Zehme. New York: Delacorte, 1999. 362 pp. Can$39.95.

'Unfettered by personal agenda or ego, Zehme's take on Kaufman offers ;ore insight into his life than *Andy Kaufman Revealed,* another recent biog-;phy, by Kaufman's writing partner, Bob Zmuda, who takes too much :edit for the comic's star turns. In fact, Zehme uses many of Kaufman's wn unpublished writings and lets us revel in the musings and commen-ıries of one of comedy's leading exponents of the '70s."

Glenda Fordham. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 15, 2000: D16.

**Kennedy, Edward M.**

*Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography.* Adam Clymer. New York: Morrow, 1999. 692 pp. $27.50.

'Edward M. Kennedy' is a thorough, careful account of a passionate inter-sting man and politician, but it is at times pedestrian in its account of the ninutiae of legislation and political maneuvering. There are times when it night have been better if the author had stepped back and chanced his arm n an explanation, on a description of the whole process, rather than focus-ng in so tight on Kennedy's role in it. One wishes he had given us a more ounded portrait of this remarkable man—idealistic and arrogant, sensitive nd Rabelasian, for whom the cliché 'flawed' is for once the right word."

Godfrey Hodgson. *NYTBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 18.

'Clymer's book is comprehensive but uninspiring. He is not an engaging vriter, and the narrative lacks verve and momentum. In chronicling the life f a senator, the biographer's challenge is to bring to life the behind-the-cenes legislative wrangling; occasionally Clymer succeeds, but in many nstances he falls short."

Scott Sherman. *WP,* Dec. 13, 1999: 35.

**Kennedy, Robert F.**

*Robert Kennedy: Brother Protector.* James W. Hilty. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997. 642 pp. $34.95.

'The book's greatest strength is its straightforward, thorough examination of the major controversies surrounding John and Robert Kennedy. . . . Hilty masterfully blends secondary sources with archival resources, mem-oirs, personal accounts, and interviews in persuasively presenting Robert as an expert campaign manager, effective Congressional counsel, and aggres-sive attorney general who acted successfully against organized crime and racial segregation."

Lawrence J. McAndrews. *The American Historical Review* 104.5 (Dec. 1999): 1716–17.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Kipling, Rudyard**

*Rudyard Kipling.* Andrew Lycett. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999. 659 pp. £25.00. Can$45.00.

"Lycett, certainly a Kipling devotee, has found a fair number of more or less unknown details that justify, up to a point, one more life of Kipling. . . . But where . . . is the writer who left behind the books we are meant to question? . . . Gossip (because that is what ultimately biography amounts to) is all very well, and we enjoy hearing how the author of the books we love went about his daily business: we are keen to see how the magician performs his tricks behind the curtain, even if the truth is always disappointing and if, even worse, it proves to be neither enriching nor revealing. In that sense, Lycett's *Rudyard Kipling* is perfectly serviceable and tells us everything we already knew about our author, and even a little more."

Alberto Manguel. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 22, 2000: D6.

"Most of the scars are known, but Andrew Lycett probes them with patience and tact. Lycett is good at quietly pointing out the intellectual waywardness of Kipling's writings, his shameless power to contradict himself."

Adrian Poole. *TLS,* Oct. 15, 1999: 30.

**Koestler, Arthur**

*Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind.* David Cesarani. New York: The Free Press, 1999. 646 pp. $30.00.

"David Cesarani puts a new spin on the biographer's conceit. Though Koestler himself is safely dead, there are a number of people who had known him still inconveniently hanging on. Cesarani writes: 'In the course of my research I conducted interviews with many of those who knew Koestler. I treated the results with caution since, over time, Koestler either beguiled or alienated those who came into contact with him.' Well, that puts them all in their places. 'Whenever possible,' Cesarani continues, 'I have relied on his own diaries, letters, notebooks and published writings, along with those of his contemporaries.' Not that Cesarani trusts Koestler's autobiography or diaries either. But at least papers can't answer back."

Julian Barnes. *NYRB,* Feb. 20, 2000: 23.

"Cesarani is still fairly young, but in this book a sound spanking is what he seems to be hoping to inflict upon the incorrigibly juvenile Koestler. His disapproval of his subject is almost unremitting, and he chastises Koestler frequently for his irresponsibility and fecklessness, first toward his parents, later toward his lovers. Koestler is even told off for taking holidays in Austria in the 1960's—something no good Jew should apparently have done. Cesarani's high-minded condemnation of Koestler's antics would

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


carry more weight had not detailed descriptions of his womanizing so obviously helped to sell copies of his book."

Mark Mazower. *NYTBR,* Jan. 2, 2000: 7.

**Krasner, Lee**

*Lee Krasner.* Robert Hobbs. New York: Independent Curators International/Abrams, 1999. 224 pp. $49.50.

"What would Lee Krasner—famously blunt, plain-spoken woman impatient to all forms of pretension—have made of the trendy critical jargon that Robert Hobbs, an art history professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, employs? . . . Without recourse to labored intellectualizing, B. H. Friedman, a friend and early biographer of Pollock, simply portrays Krasner in all her prickly glory in his introduction to this book."

Evelyn Toynton. *NYTBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 21.

**Kuzmin, Mikhail**

*Mikhail Kuzmin: A Life in Art.* John E. Malamud and Nikolay Borgomolov. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 463 pp. £30.95.

"One cannot praise this biography too highly; the narrative is fascinating. To do this for a Russian poet, none of whose verse exists in a good English translation, is a remarkable achievement."

Donald Rayfield. *TLS,* Oct. 15, 1999: 29.

**Kyōka, Izumi**

*The Similitude of Blossoms: A Critical Biography of Izumi Kyōka (1873–1939), Japanese Novelist and Playwright.* Charles Shirō Inouye. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998. 397 pp. $40.00.

"That Inouye has thought long and hard about Izumi Kyōka is evident throughout *The Similitude of Blossoms.* The life itself has been thoroughly researched, and the reader comes away knowing precisely how Kyōka decorated his living quarters, how finicky he was in his eating habits and uninhibited in his drinking ones. . . . During the final stage of his career, Kyōka shifted his interest from the ethereal eroticism of his greatest stories to a more direct presentation of declining sexuality in the aging male protagonist. He finally managed to redirect his creative urge back to its proper channel and produced 'The Heartvine' . . . regarded . . . as his greatest work."

James O'Brien. *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.3 (Aug. 1999): 843–44.

**Lombardi, Vince**

*When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi.* David Maraniss. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 591 pp. $26.00.

"'When Pride Still Mattered' stands in stark contrast to most other books

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

by and about coaches. Maraniss shows not only that winning isn't everything, it's not even what it's cracked up to be."

Allen St. John. *NYTBR,* Oct. 1999: 20.

"Maraniss has a gift for concise explication that omits boring detail. He has amassed a huge amount of research, but uses it with admirable selectivity. His narrative is rich in scenes and personalities and seamlessly catches the sound and feeling of the United States during Lombardi's life. . . . It reads like an epic novel. The result is a triumph, a classic American biography."

Robert W. Creamer. *WP,* Oct. 11, 1999: 33.

**Lorca, Federico García**

*Lorca: A Dream of Life.* Leslie Stainton. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. 579 pp. Can$55.00.

"Stainton's biography draws upon a wealth of material she unearthed and collated during 14 years of researching her subject. She writes clearly and well, generously contextualizing both events and movements relevant to Lorca's exploits, pursuits and dreams, often relying on first-hand reports to explain Lorca's 'presence.' . . . Stainton provides readers with a competent and engaging chronological assessment of the quintessential artist of contradictions [but] fails adequately to illuminate the utterly essential connection between Lorca's homosexuality and his aesthetic vision."

Judith Fitzgerald. *Globe and Mail,* Nov. 13, 1999: D27.

**Mailer, Norman**

*Mailer: A Biography.* Mary V. Dearborn. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. 478 pp. $30.00. Can$45.00.

"It's tempting to say that *Mailer: A Biography* is more notable as a cultural history of the mixed success of a mighty mouth within a society ruled by excess than as a biography, except that Dearborn is so much better than most of her contemporaries at doing the things a biographer ought to do. She has mastered the art of finding the telling detail, and unfolds as much of Mailer's juicy life (multiple marriages, mistresses, tax problems, quarrels and fights) as this reader needs in plain, tough-minded narrative prose that's a model of lucidity."

T. F. Rigelhof. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 29, 2000: D11.

"'The man and his life are of equal, often competing stature with his work,' Dearborn writes. She is not, however, inclined to philosophize about this predicament. She prefers to get Mailer's contradictions and irrationalities onto the page as story, in plain English. She likes cuss words as much as Mailer does, and she likes to knock the stuffing out of him when she finds him too upholstered."

Caleb Crain. *NYTBR,* Dec. 19, 1999: 7.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Major, John**

*The Autobiography.* John Major. London: HarperCollins, 1999. 774 pp. £25.00.

"Major's account is written in a brisk, no-nonsense style that reads like he sounds. It is painfully honest and remarkably free of mean-spiritedness."

Chris Patten. *Guardian Weekly,* Oct. 28–Nov. 3, 1999: 21.

**Mandela, Nelson**

*Mandela: The Authorized Biography.* Anthony Sampson. New York: Knopf, 1999. 672 pp. $30.00.

"Because he knows Mandela and his comrades so well, Sampson brings a depth of knowledge and emotion to retelling their story that makes this work a special addition."

Glenn Frankel. *WP,* Nov. 8, 1999: 34.

**Mao Zedong**

*Mao: A Life.* Philip Short. New York: Holt, 1999. 782 pp. $37.50. Can$45.00.

*Mao Zedong.* Jonathan Spence. New York: Lipper-Viking/Penguin, 1999. 188 pp. $19.95. Can$27.99.

"Both books agree . . . that Mao was a supreme leader who brooked no opposition . . . who was emotionally remote . . . [and] both books also lay bare the half-truths and outright lies that Mao fed Edgar Snow. . . . Both these biographies, especially the longer one, breathe life into the complicated history of the Communist Party's long road to victory."

Jan Wong. *Globe and Mail,* Oct. 8: D9.

"Philip Short's volume is, despite its length, wonderfully readable and rich in background material and eyewitness accounts. He tells the story superbly. He does not raise many conceptual questions, or solve the mystery of the motivation of Mao and his associates, but we at last have a real sense of the man, warts and all. . . . Jonathan Spence covers the same ground confidently and with authority. There are differences of emphasis and interpretation, but at a quarter of the length of Short's volume, it is inevitably less rich. For those without the time and devotion required by Short, it is an excellent account."

Nigel Harris. *Guardian Weekly,* Dec. 9–15, 1999: 16.

"Both authors have a thesis of sorts. Jonathan Spence's is draped in a metaphor. Mao, in his view, was a 'Lord of Misrule,' a kind of fiesta prince of the night who turned the world upside down. . . . But Mao, in Spence's view, did it for real, and not just on festive occasions. He wanted to reverse

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


the order forever, exterminate all lords and masters, install himself as the people's permanent Lord of Misrule. And create chaos whenever things got too settled. It is an interesting metaphor, but it does not quite explain why Mao, from an early stage in his career, was keen on extermination. . . . Philip Short, whose book is in every sense weightier than Spence's, draws moral distinctions between Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. Indeed, he believes Mao is 'in a different category from other twentieth-century tyrants.' Hitler exterminated people, mainly the Jews, because he thought they were vermin. Stalin personally signed the death warrants of thousands because they might have threatened him in some way. But Mao, says Short, had a vision, a utopian dream of the total transformation of China, and if many eggs were cracked in the process of cooking that particular omelet, this should count, in the Supreme Court of History, as manslaughter rather than murder. For, as Short puts it, 'Even as his policies caused the death of millions, Mao never entirely lost his belief in the efficacy of thought reform and the possibility of redemption.'"

Ian Buruma. *NYRB,* Feb. 24, 2000: 20–25.

**Mars, Forrest.** See **Hershey, Milton.**

**Marx, Karl**

*Karl Marx: A Life.* Francis Wheen. London: Fourth Estate, 1999. 431 pp. Can$50.00. £20.00.

"If you've never read much about Marx, and would like to know more about how he personally made his way in the world, this is a good book. It is approachable, direct and full of stories that make some sense of an extraordinarily difficult life. . . . Wheen's central premise—that all of Marx's followers got him wrong and that he has been terribly misinterpreted—is simply too easy. Marx was not directly responsible for the Gulag, but he was the author of a theory that has created much misery in the world."

Bob Rae. *Globe and Mail,* Feb. 5, 2000: D3.

"This richly entertaining biography manages to humanise the founder of historical materialism without trivialising him, and offers a spirited defence of its grotesquely travestied subject. . . . This wonderfully readable biography is neither debunkery nor hagiography. Critical of its protagonist, yet fundamentally sympathetic, it restores a much-demonised figure to his full humanity. Intellectually speaking, the book is a little thin. Wheen wears his considerable learning about Marx's career with the lapidary lightness of a fine columnist, and can be as witty and quotable as his subject. It is a boldly unfashionable book, but a delightful one."

Terry Eagleton. *Guardian Weekly,* Oct. 14–20, 1999: 17.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Marx, Wheen argues, predicted the most important developments in the world economy. . . . Clearly Wheen admires his subject, but he approaches Marx rather as an enthusiastic naturalist might view a virile alligator: The beast is magnificent, but some of its habits are frankly disappointing. . . . The author's relish is conveyed through a lively narrative. . . . The key element missing from this vivid portrait is an attempt to explain Marx's commitment to revolutionary politics."

Mark Garnett. *TLS,* Oct. 8, 1999: 28.

**Mazarin, Jules, Cardinal**

*Mazarin.* Claude Dulong. Paris: Perrin, 1999. 420 pp. F149.

Nothing much new here, except perhaps details about the long negotiations with Spain (1659). But most readers may have the impression they are reading something they already knew. Written in a fairly free way, mixing dialogues, historical descriptions, and parallels with contemporary situations, the book does not make unpleasant reading. Still one would like to grasp the purport and usefulness of some of the anecdotes: biography is neither a historical novel nor the history of a country or of a milieu.

Alain Cabantous. *Le Monde des Livres,* Nov. 19, 1999: 7.

**McCain, John**

*John McCain: An American Odyssey.* Robert Tinberg. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 235 pp. $13.00.

". . . Tinberg's effusive praise for those who served in Vietnam, peppered with his contempt for the 60's draft dodgers, leaves the real John McCain once again as inscrutable to the reader as he was to his captors."

Nathaniel Tripp. *NYTBR,* Oct. 3, 1999: 17.

**McCarthy, Joseph**

*Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator.* Arthur Herman. New York: The Free Press, 1999. 404 pp. $26.00.

"This hagiography begins with the author's sentimental pilgrimage to McCarthy's grave in Appleton, Wis., where he meditated on how unfair such liberals as William Fulbright and [Richard] Rovere had been to the anti-communists. It's a ridiculous opening, as Herman uses this graveside setting . . . to set forth his mission: to tell 'the real story' of McCarthy's Cold War crusade. . . . But what Herman appears not to grasp is the vast difference between responsible anti-communists of the early years of the Cold War . . . and an unprincipled, opportunistic bully like McCarthy."

Douglas Brinkley. *LATBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 3.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

" . . . in 'Joseph McCarthy,' Arthur Herman, the coordinator of the Western Civilization program at the Smithsonian Institution, argues that McCarthy was an unfairly maligned patriot who ultimately became a victim to the immense conspiracy he was attempting to expose."

Alonzo L. Hamby. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 32.

**McCloskey, Deirdre**

*Crossing: A Memoir.* Deirdre McCloskey. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. 288 pp. Can$38.95.

"Deirdre McCloskey entered the world as Dónald, a bright and athletic youth [who] graduated from Harvard, going on to make a major name for himself in academic economics as a conservative free-market theorist. He married, had two children, and led an apparently normal, successful and happy upper-middle-class existence." McCloskey, a life-long cross-dresser, concluded in 1994, when his last child had left for university, "that he was a woman." For McCloskey, "a transsexual denied will die" and this led him, now her, to fight through "the politics of gender-changing and the myriad obstacles placed in the way of gender-crossers." McCloskey also "details the kinds of friendships that women form and the meaning within them [which] showed her clearly the differences between the masculinity she was fleeing and the femininity she knew was right for her."

Michael A. Gilbert. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 22, 2000: D5.

**McCourt, Frank**

*'Tis.* Frank McCourt. London: Flamingo, 1999. 385 pp. £17.99.

"Few of those engaged by McCourt's straightforward style will be able to resist this pacey, fluent sequel. But . . . the second part of McCourt's life is unlikely to have the same impact as *Angela's Ashes.*"

C. L. Dallat. *Guardian Weekly,* Oct. 7–13, 1999: 22.

**McMurtry, Larry**

*Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond.* Larry McMurtry. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 204 pp. $21.00.

"It was the 'living speech' of the local storyteller that McMurtry was listening for at the Archer County Dairy Queen when he set out to write his memoirs. Or so he says. In fact, over the course of *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen,* he reports nothing of what he hears there. . . . Instead, he uses his time there as a spur to tell his own story. As for Walter Benjamin, he is only nominally at the Dairy Queen—he's present enough, that is, to give McMurtry a way of writing a literary autobiography embedded in a consideration of the most basic element of literature, the story itself."

Sue Halpern. *NYRB,* Dec. 2, 1999: 30.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Meredith, George**

*The Amazing Victorian: A Life of George Meredith.* Mervyn Jones. London: Constable, 1999. 311 pp. £20.00.

Jones . . . is impatient with the novels' elaborate plots . . . but he gives a concise critique of each major title, with precise persuasive judgements. He is interesting on Meredith's political views and the book as a whole locates Meredith in . . . a European context."

Jan Marsh. *TLS,* Oct. 8, 1999: 26.

**Milosevic, Slobodan**

*Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant.* Dusko Doder and Louise Branson. New York: The Free Press, 1999. 304 pp. $25.00. Can$38.95.

Doder and Branson "show clearly and in an informed way how an individual, given an opportunity, shapes history. . . . The one serious weakness, in an otherwise excellent review of the facts that have kept Milosevic in power so long, is the absence of a discussion of the effects of international sanctions. A very powerful case can be made that the sanctions helped Milosevic's hold on power."

Mihailo Crnobrnja. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 22, 2000: D14.

'Doder and Branson usefully trace Milosevic's career, showing that he did well from the start. Within three years, he was already on the Party payroll as an activist in charge of ideology. He quickly grasped the importance of having a powerful sponsor, someone on whose coattails he could advance, and he found one in Ivan Stambolic, who came from an old Communist family. . . . Doder and Branson describe Milosevic's machinations to get rid of Stambolic in the late 1980s and then replace him as the Serbian leader. At the same time he transformed himself from a Communist to a nationalist. . . . One of the problems with Doder and Branson's book is that it lacks a larger perspective. They do not consider how the territorial ambitions and intolerance of other groups have contributed to the mess."

Charles Simic. *NYRB,* Jan. 20, 2000: 26.

" . . . with "Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant,' Doder and Branson have written the first full account of the Yugoslav president and the rise of his 'television dictatorship.' The authors are respected correspondents with over three decades' experience abroad between them, much of it in the south Balkans. This is not, however, the kind of book one would have expected them to write. . . . Doder and Branson are too good to settle for the story they offer here. With few exceptions, their own experiences are sadly lacking."

Charles King. *NYTBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 64.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Momsen, Charles**

*The Terrible Hours: The Man Behind the Greatest Submarine Rescue in History.* Peter Maas. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 259 pp. $25.00.

"Only the churlish would wish to detract from Momsen's greatness as a pioneer. Those who owed their lives to him would feel nothing but humble gratitude. But Maas's never-before-in-the-history-of-the-planet rhetoric, intended to heap fresh laurels on an already respected man's memorial, contrives to isolate him falsely from a great historical enterprise shared by half a dozen nations and spread over many years."

James Hamilton-Paterson. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 23.

**Moodie, Susanna, and Catharine Parr Traill**

*Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill.* Toronto: Viking, 1999. 379 pp. Can$35.00.

These sisters moved to pioneer Canada with their husbands in the early 1830s. "[T]he hardships facing the sisters were appalling, and they were perfectly unprepared. . . . [T]he significant fact for Canadian memory and literature is that Susanna and Catharine, toiling to maintain an air of gentility through frightening shifts of fortune, and raising their numerous children in drafty cabins over which 'hunger and want hovered like harpies,' wrote it all down. . . . Decade after decade they wrote books, some good some bad. Besides their scary books on Canada, and their instructive books on Canada (Catharine was particularly good on botany), they churned out cautionary tales for children, romantic novels set in Europe, and reams of articles and poems. Given that they grew up with a conviction that they were writers before all, given that they were constantly in need of money, *how* did they find the time? This is a delicious read."

Anne Hart. *Globe and Mail,* Nov. 6, 1999: D13.

**Mosley, Diana**

*Diana Mosley: A Biography.* Jan Dalley. London: Faber. 289 pp. £26.00.

"In this intelligent and well-written biography, Jan Dalley takes a fresh look at her subject's complex character and creates a definitive portrait capturing the easy charm and the appalling callousness of Diana Mosley. . . . Her Diana is an intriguing figure whose flaws and virtues help to illuminate the political and social failures of a generation."

Michael Shelden. *TLS,* Oct. 1, 1999: 13.

**Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus**

*Mozart: A Cultural Biography.* Robert W. Gutman. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999. 840 pp. $40.00.

"Subtitling his latest book 'A Cultural Biography,' Robert W. Gutman

CC-0. Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri Collection, Haridwar.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


aims an impressive raison d'être for his life of Mozart, painting a large, vish, and crowded canvas that thoroughly explores the wider world in hich Mozart lived and worked. . . . There is, in short, everything in this ook a reader could conceivably want to know about Mozart's age, hough at times the minutiae swamp the music. . . . In its own way, utman's new biography is a success: Mozart's world has rarely been escribed so fully. But for balanced treatment and for psychological pene- ation, [Maynard] Solomon's 'Mozart' remains the life of choice."

Peter Gay. *LATBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 7–8.

**lurdoch, Iris**

*ris and Her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire.* John Bayley. New York: Norton, 1999. 275 pp. $22.95.

There are a number of classics of bereavement, notably C. S. Lewis's 1963 emoir, 'A Grief Observed,' but this, alas, is not among their number. erhaps its honesty will provide succor for the many thousands who are restling with the traumas left by Alzheimer's. That, in the end, must be s justification."

Robert Crum. *NYTBR,* Oct. 3, 1999: 9.

**)'Brien, Flann [Brian O'Nolan]**

*No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien.* Anthony Cronin. New York: Fromm, 1999. 260 pp. $29.95.

Anthony Cronin, poet and novelist, and most recently the author of a very ine biography of Samuel Beckett, has written a fascinating, dispiriting, and nflinchingly candid portrait of a complex and ultimately sad figure. He oes O'Nolan no favors, but then again O'Nolan did himself none, either. He was a fiercely independent spirit, a hater of humbug and hypocrisy. He ad a clear eye for human folly and an acute awareness of the limitlessness f human wickedness. He was not fooled: in May 1944 he wrote in *The rish Times,* 'When the world is at peace, horror camps are not pho- ographed.' Yet he could never 'fly by the nets' that the Ireland of his time et up to snare such spirits as his. Cronin pays full tribute to the originali- y and subversive power of the Flann O'Brien of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman,* but he makes no effort to gloss over the faults and ailings of Brian O'Nolan.

John Banville. *NYRB,* Nov. 18, 1999: 30.

**Parrish, Maxfield**

*Maxfield Parrish: 1870–1966.* Sylvia Yount. New York: Abrams/ Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1999. 160 pp. $39.95.

"The rise and fall of critical assessment of the artist is at the crux of Sylvia

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Yount's ambitious 'Maxfield Parrish'; if the case she builds for returning him to an honored place in art history is not airtight, it is certainly meaty."

Hilarie M. Sheets. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 22.

**Pflug, Christiane**

*Simple Things: The Story of a Friendship.* Karen Lavut. Toronto: Mercury, 1999. 173 pp. Can$19.95.

"Christiane Pflug was an artist, wife and mother of two teenage daughters. . . . Karen Lavut's intricately choreographed memoir . . . moves like a stately pavane, circling and re-circling the horrific central act [Pflug's suicide], stepping backward to the Pflugs' early lives . . . advancing again to the hours and days immediately following Christiane's death."

Helen McLean. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 29, 2000: D5.

**Pius XII**

*Le Pape et Hitler: L'histoire secrète de Pie XII* [Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII]. John Cornwell. Paris: Albin Michel, 1999. 504 pp. F150.

The only revelation here is Hitler's plan for abducting the Pope in 1943. But there are many minor mistakes (the author does not know Italian and French works very well), an imprecise last chapter, and many conjectures. On the whole, not a reference book, but an indictment, or considering Pius XII's pending beatification, an evidence against it.

Etienne Fouilloux. *Le Monde des Livres,* Sept. 17, 1999: 1.

"Cornwell is a Catholic, and did not expect at the start of his work to be ending up in the camp of those who have highlighted the Pope's sad moral failure and his fallibility as a human being. But reluctantly, he concludes that a loud and widely disseminated statement from Rome would have made a difference to the fate of European Jewry."

V. R. Berghahn. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 11.

**Pollack, Jackson**

*Jackson Pollack.* Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith. Translated from English by J. P. Mourlon. Paris: Tristram, 1999. 768 pp. F195.

Pollock had the reputation of being excessive, and so is his biography. Massive, exhaustive, precise, meticulous, with fairly good descriptions of places and milieus, and rather felicitous group portraits, it indulges far too much in gossip, chronicles take the place of analyses, and the interpretation of pictures is based on what one hesitates to call psychoanalysis. The authors are unable to write a single convincing line on the one subject that matters: Pollock's painting. The man escapes them, too.

Philippe Dagen. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 22, 1999: 6.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**olo, Marco**

*larco Polo and the Discovery of the World.* John Larner. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999. 250 pp. $29.95.

Larner, a historian at Glasgow University, has a special expertise in the eld of medieval and Renaissance geography, and 'Marco Polo and the liscovery of the World' is an eloquent attempt to prove that Marco Polo's ain importance was to the discipline of geography. This focus leads Larn- to much creative rethinking of things that have puzzled many readers."

Jonathan Spence. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 16.

**owell, Dawn**

*elected Letters of Dawn Powell: 1913–1963.* Ed. Tim Page. New York: Holt, 1999. 373 pp. $30.00.

Page's devotion is a moving thing. Though he never met Dawn Powell, he without academic affiliation or other sponsorship, her ultimate scholar, iographer, fan: many of her letters are from Page's personal collection, just s many of the photographs in his 1998 biography of her are his own prop- rty as well, and he has written warm and perceptive introductions to new ditions of her books. Tim Page is the kind of reader Powell never knew he could or would have."

Lorrie Moore. *NYTBR,* Nov. 7, 1999: 18–19.

**eagan, Ronald**

*Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan.* Edmund Morris. New York: Random House, 1999. 874 pp. $35.00.

Morris's book is not memoir, but, in part at least, a reverie. The author, he Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Teddy Roosevelt, was enlisted 14 ears ago to write a definitive life based on extraordinary access to the President. In the end, the access was of little use, since Reagan devoted nost of their conversations to tired anecdotes, tall tales and evasions. Even ess informative was the President's private diary. Whether out of inspira- ion, writer's block, or despair, Morris has produced a book unique in the nnals of serious biography, a partly fictionalized account narrated by an imaginary contemporary of the former President."

Steven R. Weisman. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 78.

"'Dutch' reads like a novel, because, well, that's what it really is. Or, per- haps, more accurately, it is a docudrama, a prose version of Oliver Stone's 'JFK,' which splices together historically accurate evidence from oral inter- views and legitimate archival sources with fabricated letters and fictional creations. Perhaps the book's dust jacket or an accompanying press release will apprise readers that this authorized biography is primarily a work of Morris's imagination. But the 672 pages of text and the 168 pages of notes

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

piled up before me say nothing of the sort. Quite the contrary, the text artfully disguises Morris's blending of fact and fiction, real and fabricated dialogue."

Joseph J. Ellis. *WP,* Oct. 18, 1999: 33.

**Rembrandt Van Rijn**

*Rembrandt's Eyes.* Simon Schama. New York: Knopf, 1999. 750 pp. $50.00.

"'Rembrandt's Eyes' is not chronologically organized. . . . It begins (the year is 1629; Rembrandt is 23) with a long and gripping description of an early 'Self-Portrait.' . . . A dazzling ability to conjure up what Schama calls the quiddity of a painting is repeatedly on show in what follows. . . . And then the story begins. But, most surprising, for the next 150 pages or so, the story we are told is not of Rembrandt but of Rubens. . . . Schama has transformed [Gary Schwartz's] indictment of Rembrandt's career into a sympathetic story of wanting and failing to be like Rubens, the most successful artist of the day at the European courts. Not to succeed in becoming a Dutch Rubens is a limited kind of failure after which, in this account, Rembrandt went on to be himself. . . . Schama has the great gift of bringing to life whatever he turns to. This is a matter of creative imagination and creative writing. Together they predispose him to get at art's relationship to life."

Svetlana Alpers. *LATBR,* Nov. 14, 1999: 1–2.

"It's characteristic of this intermittently engaging, eccentric, overlong, self-indulgent and frustrating book that the arguments often seem a little pumped up and more than a little rhetorical. Turns of phrase and enormous accumulations of detail seem designed to sweep away whatever might not quite add up."

Michael Kimmelman. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 19–20.

**Rivera, Diego**

*Diego Rivera.* Pete Hamill. New York: Abrams, 1999. 207 pp. $49.50.

"Hamill, who studied art in Mexico when he was a young man, writes authoritatively about Rivera's work and diverse styles. He also describes the pivotal role Rivera's art played in Mexican development."

Carolyn T. Hughes. *NYTBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 75.

**Rockne, Knute**

*Rockne of Notre Dame: The Making of a Football Legend.* Ray Robinson. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 290 pp. $25.00.

"Robinson places most of the blame for the creation of Rockne's reputation on the 'gee whiz' sportswriters of the day, especially the fawning Grantland Rice. However, Robinson himself is overly fond of his exclamation points and at times his prose lapses lazily into cutesy hyperbole. For the most part,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


owever, Robinson's book is a solid portrait of one of football's most solid igures."

John D. Thomas. *NYTBR,* Oct. 3, 1999: 20.

**oosevelt, Eleanor**

*Eleanor Roosevelt.* Vol. 2: *1933–1938.* Blanche Wiesen Cook. New York: Viking, 1999. 686 pp. $34.95.

"The strength of this charming biography is in Cook's sober, unadorned pproach to her subject. In a work that is neither hagiography nor a femiist call to arms, Cook allows the facts to speak for themselves. May the next olume answer the many questions that this one leaves unanswered."

Dorothea Straus. *LATBR,* Nov. 7, 1999: 12.

*The Extraordinary Mrs. R: A Friend Remembers Eleanor Roosevelt.* William Turner Levy and Cynthia Eagle Russett. New York: Wiley, 1999. 256 pp. $22.95.

"He [Levy] recounts Mrs. Roosevelt's reminiscences of her childhood, her nsights into Churchill, Eisenhower and Nixon, and illuminating anecdotes f visits by Haille Selassie, Khruschev, Tito, the Shah of Iran and John F. Kennedy, among others. While Levy and his collaborator, Cynthia Eagle Russett, a history professor at Yale, have an irritating tendency to make Levy central to Eleanor Roosevelt's story, his recollections are delightful, oving and unique when they concentrate on his extraordinary friend."

Patricia Fieldstrel. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 22.

**Rosselli, Carlo**

*Carlo Rosselli: Socialist Heretic and Antifascist Exile.* Stanislao G. Pugliese. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 309 pp. $35.00.

"Pugliese, a historian at Hofstra University, has chosen to write primarily n intellectual biography, and has done a commendable job of explaining Rosselli's maverick position within European Socialism. While this is an ntirely respectable choice, the book at times seems concerned with the academic aim of situating Rosselli within the bibliography of European radical political thought rather than reanimating Rosselli and his world. . . . This is somewhat unfortunate, since Rosselli was refreshingly nonideological and placed great emphasis on the need for action."

Alexander Stille. *NYTBR,* Dec. 19, 1999: 32.

**The Rothschilds**

*The House of Rothschild.* Vol. 1: *Money's Prophets, 1798–1848.* 518 pp. $18.95. Vol. 2: *The World's Banker, 1849–1899.* 658 pp. $34.95. Niall Ferguson. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1999.

"The author's access to the Rothschild archives is a privilege that again and

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

again turns into the reader's penalty. Ferguson quotes and cites, and cites and quotes, endlessly, excessively, promiscuously. It is understandable that when presented with the opportunity for such voluptuous source-digging, a writer would be tempted to indulge. Ferguson has gorged to the point of research-poisoning. The result is an unwieldy swamp of documentation, with nuggets mired in irrelevancies. . . . As for Ferguson's prose, it serves him best when it's content to be serviceable. When it aspires to the literary, the strain shows. . . . In essaying a biography, Ferguson has produced a valuable reference work. Its most precious feature is its index."

Frederic Morton. *LATBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 4.

"The central historical question raised by his book is the extent to which high finance shaped the politics of the nineteenth century when, as he says, the Rothschilds were 'the world's banker.' Although published as a single volume in England, Viking has split up Ferguson's long history into two volumes for the American market. . . . Ferguson's book is not easy to read. It is too densely packed for that. Was so much financial detail really necessary? It will fascinate aficionados of the bond market, and much of it helps to show the relationship between financial and political events. . . . Taken together, Ferguson's two volumes are a stupendous achievement, a triumph of historical research and imagination. No serious historian can write about the connection between politics, diplomacy, and economics of the nineteenth century in the same way again."

Robert Skidelsky. *NYRB,* Dec. 16, 1999: 24.

**Rowse, A. L.**

*A Man of Contradictions: A Life of A. L. Rowse.* Richard Ollard. London: Penguin, 1999. 368 pp. £20.00.

"Maintaining a delicate balancing act between Rowse's many 'Contradictions,' Ollard combines admiration for his subject's achievements with due acknowledgement that the man was 'impossible.'"

Katherine Duncan Jones. *TLS,* Oct. 22, 1999: 35.

**Sagan, Carl**

*Carl Sagan: A Life.* Keay Davidson. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999. 482 pp. $30.00. £19.50. Can$41.95.

*Carl Sagan: A Life in the Cosmos.* William Poundstone. New York: Holt, 1999. 449 pp. $30.00. Can$45.00.

"Both books contain the full sweep of Sagan's impact as a scientist and popularizer; the differences between them are in the style and emphasis. William Poundstone's *Carl Sagan: A Life in the Cosmos* is stronger on the central scientific issues in Sagan's career. . . . Keay Davidson's *Carl Sagan:*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


*Life* is richer in anecdotes and quotes. Davidson's discussion of Sagan's personality is particularly insightful. . . . The picture that he paints is not a pretty one."

Chris Impey. *American Scientist* 88.1 (Jan.-Feb. 2000): 74–78.

"As both of these new biographies explain, choosing the role of showman over that of 'traditional scientist' comes with a price. Many fellow scientists reacted to Sagan's fame with dismay or resentment; some would charge that he wasn't a 'real' scientist. . . . These two books cover virtually the same ground. Both writers had access to Sagan's wives, family and friends, and both books are thorough and rich in anecdote. I felt that Davidson probed more deeply into Sagan's psyche, but Poundstone has greater literary flair."

Dan Falk. *Globe and Mail,* Dec. 4, 1999: D18.

"Davidson certainly offers a richly detailed and captivating documentary of the story behind this very public figure and the people and events surrounding him. But the telling is marred by the author's yearning to discredit his subject, and it is embarrassing, even painful, that he has found ready accomplices in some of those closest to Sagan. . . . Despite its fascinating look at 20th century scientific history and Sagan's role in it, this book suffers from its own obsession: to portray Sagan as a flawed man and scientist. Its author seems incapable of sustained objective assessment, and many assertions are not supported by evidence. . . . I'm glad that those who felt slighted by the man have finally had a chance to get it off their chests. But, reader beware. *Carl Sagan: A Life,* though a riveting tale, tells as much about the all too human feelings of jealousy and resentment as it does about the man who inspired them."

Carolyn Porco. *Guardian Weekly,* Dec. 2–8, 1999: 16.

"For Davidson, Sagan is a scientist who is also a celebrity. For Poundstone, Sagan is a celebrity who is also a scientist. Davidson attends more extensively to the intellectual substance of Sagan's work, especially in books other than 'Cosmos.' Sagan's 1977 Pulitzer Prize-winning 'Dragons of Eden' figures in Poundstone's book almost exclusively as an episode in Sagan's rise to fame. But Davidson provides a discerning analysis of it in relation to Sagan's long-term engagements with 'reason versus unreason, science versus faith, desire versus objectivity.' Davidson also gives a fuller account of the scientific culture in which Sagan was educated and against the limits of which he often struggled. Both writers devote almost the same space to one of Sagan's mentors, the Nobel laureate H. J. Muller, but Davidson manages to tell us a great deal about this politically left-wing geneticist. Davidson has more effectively harvested the research of historians of science, especially Ronald Doel, who conducted a lengthy oral history interview with Sagan in 1991. Yet Poundstone offers a much more

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

complete picture than Davidson does of Sagan's life in Ithaca, N.Y., as Cornell University's most famous professor."

David Holliger. *NYTBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 15.

**Said, Edward**

*Out of Place: A Memoir.* Edward Said. New York: Knopf, 1999. 352 pp. $26.95. £25.00. Can$39.95.

"The first half of the book deals with his dysfunctional family and childhood, with a demanding and punishing father, physically oppressive teachers and an emotionally and psychologically abusive mother. His life in the U.S. was not much better: deliberately cut off from his family, isolated socially at Princeton and troubled by romantic entanglements at Harvard. . . . While the book is engaging and well written, it is by no means a page-turner. Where it succeeds is in making readers think about and relive their own childhoods."

Peter McKenna. *Globe and Mail,* Dec. 11, 1999: D18.

"Here is a candid and searing examination of parental effect, told with a mixture of love, perplexity and resentment. It is also a story of cultural and historical crisis, but, overwhelmingly, private life dominates public events. . . . The directing force of Said's growing up is intimate and familial: the personalities of his parents. He does them proud in a literary sense. They step from the page. . . . Given Said's later commitments . . . it is surprising how small a role politics play in his book. . . . There are points when the narrative suffers from an overkill of minutely recalled incidents. But these irritations are offset by some precise, vivid writing and a sharp eye for the idiosyncrasies of others. The private life of a public man."

Penelope Lively. *Guardian Weekly,* Oct. 28–Nov. 3, 1999: 22.

"On the first page of his memoir, Edward Said, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia, lately president of the Modern Language Association—a man well established in American academic and intellectual place—declares that he has always had an overriding feeling of being 'out of place.' Half a century of living and working in the United States seems only to have deepened the sensation for him. But, according to Said, it began earlier. *Out of Place* is a very personal, very subjective account of the life Said has led intermittently in the Arab countries and in the United States. There must be many reasons why a man feels as out of place as Said maintains he does. The reasons cannot be purely political, and Said, who together with his family has lived in exile from his native Palestine since the age of twelve, does not pretend that they are. This engrossing memoir by a critic and historian of ideas, who has stimulated American and Arab thinkers for many years, is only marginally 'political.'

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


it is a family chronicle that deals more with Said's internal makeup—the emotional minefields he crossed in his life—than with the strictly political events that have affected it."

Amos Elon. *NYRB,* Nov. 18, 1999: 12.

"Said's brilliant progression through Princeton and Harvard to the chair at Columbia, his writing on music and literature, his accomplishments at the piano, the achievements of a remarkably successful and fulfilled life, barely feature in this book. The impression which endures is of a restless spiritual energy ceaselessly grappling with the contradictions, complexities, and injustices of the world from the perspective of privileged marginality he inherited from his wealthy but dislocated family. The circumstances in which the book was written, in periods of remission or between bouts of chemotherapy, add to its testimentary force. This is not an apologia hastily assembled to counter Zionist polemics. It is a powerful and, at the most fundamental level, a thoroughly convincing statement about a man who has helped to illuminate our crisis-ridden world with its contradictions and complexities.

Malise Ruthven. *TLS,* Oct. 8, 1999: 29.

**Salisbury, Marquis of**

*Salisbury: Victorian Titan.* Andrew Roberts. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999. 938 pp. £25.00.

*Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography.* David Steele. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. 455 pp. £45.00.

"Both are excellent scholarly studies by authors who have trawled prodigiously in the sources. . . . Steele has the deeper acquaintance with the period. Roberts' advantage lies in greater space which enables him to give the more rounded picture of Salisbury as an individual . . . and more ample consideration of the major episodes of his career."

Paul Smith. *TLS,* Oct. 22, 1999: 35.

**Schiff, Jacob H.**

*Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership.* Naomi W. Cohen. Hanover, NH: Brandeis UP/UP of New England, 1999. 320 pp. $35.00.

"Unlike contemporary Jewish leaders, Schiff never felt the slightest obligation to achieve communal consensus. As Cohen so amply demonstrates in her well-written and well-researched book, he did what he believed right and he expected others to follow."

Deborah E. Lipstadt. *NYTBR,* Dec. 12, 1999: 36.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Ségur, Comtesse Sophie de, née Rostopchine**

*La Comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine.* Ghislain de Diesbach. Paris: Perrin, 1999. 362 pp. F135.

At 200, Sophie Rostopchine is still alive. With her cruelties and her delights, she still repels or enchants. A "divine comtesse" for some, a "Balzac for the young" according to others, she still sells about 80,000 books a year. Diesbach's biography, which relies on around a hundred previous works, is at once simple and vivid. One of the best chapters is probably the one dealing with her "need to write," or as she put it, her "besoin d'encre."

Florence Noiville. *Le Monde des Livres,* Oct. 29, 1999: 7.

**Shakespeare, William**

*William Shakespeare.* Anthony Holden. New York: Little, Brown, 1999. 367 pp. Can$36.95.

"Holden admits that his is a populist biography, and dares to make far-fetched claims about the clues provided by the plays and poems. For instance, he sees in Rosaline's description of the merry wit Berowne, in *Love's Labour's Lost,* a self-portrait of Shakespeare. This is typical of the plausible but inconclusive speculation that fills the biography."

Philippa Sheppard. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 15, 2000: D4.

**Shostakovich, Dimitri**

*Shostakovich: A Life.* Laurel E. Fay. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 458 pp. $35.00.

"Cautious, dutiful and choked with details, her book reads more like an extended encyclopedia entry than a biography. Nor do its meticulously gathered piles of information challenge the interpretation presented elsewhere of the composer as a cowardly, embittered, Chekovian figure profoundly uncomfortable with his role as the Kremlin's official composer but lacking the moral strength to rebel."

Harlow Robinson. *NYTBR,* Jan. 2, 2000: 21.

**Sitwell, Osbert**

*Osbert Sitwell.* Phillip Ziegler. New York: Knopf, 1999. 444 pp. $30.00.

"Certainly Sitwell is worth this book, with its well-judged tone—sympathetic yet loving the bizarrerie and the richness, teasing as well as affectionate. Behind its pages lies a great deal of hard research in archives as far apart as Renishaw, Yorkshire and Austin, Tex. Dozens of people were interviewed, many of them now dead, their reminiscences safely stored in Tulsa, Okla. The least one can say is that nobody else need ask Ziegler's question [Is Sitwell worth a book?] for a long time to come . . ."

Frank Kermode. *NYTBR,* Dec. 19, 1999: 6.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection. Harvard

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Solzhenitsyn, Alexander**

*Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile.* Joseph Pearce. London: HarperCollins. 334 pp. £17.99.

"Serious students of Solzhenitsyn's life and work will find Pearce's book disappointing, but others will be pleased to have a biography of manageable length. . . . Pearce devotes particular attention to the spiritual and philosophical truths which have always concerned his subject."

Iain Elliott. *TLS,* Dec. 10, 1999: 5.

**Sondheim, Stephen**

*Stephen Sondheim: A Life.* Meryle Secrest. New York: Knopf, 1999. 461 pp. $30.00.

"The twists and turns of Sondheim's curious life are ably set out in Meryle Secrests's recent biography, which draws on extensive interviews with its subject."

Brad Leithauser. *NYRB,* Feb. 10, 2000: 35.

**Springsteen, Bruce**

*It Ain't No Sin To Be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen.* Eric Alterman. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999. 282 pp. $20.00.

"Unfortunately, much of Alterman's intelligent analysis is undermined by his gushing over his subject. The book preaches to those already converted to the cult of Springsteen, but even rabid fans will cringe at how worshipful Alterman is."

John D. Thomas. *NYTBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 75.

**Stark, Freya**

*Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark.* Jane Fletcher Geniesse. New York: Random House, 1999. 402 pp. $27.95.

"In charting Stark's public life, Jane Fletcher Geniesse's 'Passionate Nomad' supplies a fascinating individual thread in the tapestry of 20th-century Middle Eastern history. On a more intimate level, Geniesse exposes a woman whose ambition and self-enhancement were generated from a profound emotional insecurity."

Colin Thubron. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 17.

**Stein, Aurel**

*Aurel Stein: Pioneer of the Silk Road.* Annabel Walker. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1998. 393 pp. $19.95.

"The reader is introduced to the controversy surrounding Stein as one of the foreign devils who plundered China, from the perspective of some,

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

while from other vantage points he was a savior of Central Asia's antiquity, who transported the Silk Road heritage to secure quarters in Western universities and libraries."

David M. Kalivas. *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.3 (Aug. 1999): 833–34.

**The Stevensons**

*The Lighthouse Stevensons: The Extraordinary Story of the Building of the Scottish Lighthouses by the Ancestors of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Bella Bathurst. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. $24.00.

"Writing with an enchanting eloquence in her first book, Bathurst delivers a family saga that shows how the ingenuity and perseverance of a few could be 'for the benefit of the nation as a whole.' More than a century later their work serves as a memorial to them."

Raye Snover. *NYTBR,* Nov. 7, 1999: 27.

**Stravinsky, Igor**

*Stravinsky: A Creative Spring, Russia and France, 1882–1934.* Steven Walsh. New York: Knopf, 1999. 698 pp. Can$53.50.

"[Walsh's] objective is to 'establish the facts' about Stravinsky's life, by correcting decades of hearsay, hagiography, sloppy scholarship and Stravinsky's own legacy of misremembering his past. Walsh drops no bombshells in this book, but he makes good use of improved translations, Russian documents newly accessible to Westerners since the opening up of the Soviet Union, and recent specialized publications. . . . While the ideal biographer interprets and summarizes his subject's life and works for the reader's benefit, Walsh just adds detail until we lose sight of Stravinsky himself. The narrative is disrupted by gossipy digressions on irrelevant matters [and] the great composer's impact on his contemporaries and posterity is never clear."

Philip Anson. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 1, 2000: D15.

**Suor Maria Celeste**

*Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science.* Dava Sobel. New York: Walker, 1999. 420 pp. $27.00.

"There are dozens of books about Galileo and his science. This one offers no new biographical facts or scientific discussions; furthermore, a number of his daughter's letters have been previously published in English and are well known to scholars. What Sobel has done with her choice excerpts and her strong sense of story is bring a great scientist to life. Reading 'Galileo's Daughter,' we hear Galileo's voice, we sense his pain and share his excitement, and once again we marvel at how the human mind, and heart, can lift so much."

Alan Lightman. *NYTBR,* Oct. 17, 1999: 6.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection.

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**The Sulzbergers**

*The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times.* Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999. 870 pp. $29.90.

"In their lively, lavishly detailed epic . . . Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones—a former editor at Time magazine and a former reporter for The Times, respectively—show how the paper's impartial style represented more than shrewd business. It mirrored the anxieties of a German Jewish publisher from Chattanooga who sought respectability and dreaded charges of 'Jewish' influence."

Ron Chernow. *NYTBR,* Sept. 26, 1999: 8–9.

**Swango, Michael**

*Blind Eye: How the Medical Establishment Let a Doctor Get Away with Murder.* James B. Stewart. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. 334 pp. $25.00.

"'Blind Eye' is a true thriller, but it is also an indictment of protectionism within the medical profession."

Abraham Verghese. *WP,* Oct. 4, 1999: 32–33.

**Swift, Jonathan**

*Jonathan Swift: A Portrait.* Victoria Glendinning. New York: Holt, 1999. 324 pp. $35.00.

*The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.* Vol. I: *Letters 1690–1714.* Ed. David Woolley. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. 650 pp. $73.00.

". . . lapses and occasional omissions (Glendinning reproduces a scatological engraving depicting an indignity being committed upon Lemuel Gulliver but does not seem to know that it was drawn by Hogarth) would irritate me a lot more if she did not possess a measure of good sense and judiciousness, without which the greatest command of data will not suffice. . . . Although it takes us only as far as 1714 (and omits all the letters in *Journal to Stella,* an odd choice that Woolley does not explain), we see Swift in his years of political influence and in the early years of his correspondence with Stella and Vanessa."

Gregory Freely. *WP,* Sept. 6, 1999: 33.

**Telles, Raymond L.**

*The Making of a Mexican American Mayor: Raymond L. Telles of El Paso.* Mario T. Garcia. El Paso: Texas Western UP, 1998. 187 pp. $12.50.

"A neglected chapter of Mexican American history is brought to light in this beauty of a book. . . . Mario T. Garcia . . . examines direct engagement

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

efforts of a post-World War II community, a so-called Mexican American generation that refused to accept second-class citizenship; a generation that acted collectively to use the resources around them to create an uncommon story of political success."

Roberto Mario Salmon. *Pacific Historical Review* 68.4 (Nov. 1999): 693–4.

**Teresa of Avila**

*Teresa of Avila: The Progress of a Soul.* Cathleen Medwick. New York: Knopf, 1999. 282 pp. $26.00.

"The book is a marvel of scholarship and wit—a dry-eyed vision of a dry-eyed saint."

Liesl Schillinger. *NYTBR,* Dec. 26, 1999: 12–13.

**Thackeray, William Makepeace**

*Thackeray.* D. J. Taylor. London: Chatto and Windus, 1999. 512 pp. £25.00.

"[Taylor's] biography contains a considerable amount of shrewd critical comment. . . . His biography really comes to life with his account of Thackeray's early struggles in the 1830s and 1840s. . . . Drawing on a variety of sources, Taylor relates, more vividly than any previous biographer, the seedy world in which Thackeray, half-ashamed, half-exultant, immersed himself."

Catherine Peters. *TLS,* Oct. 1, 1999: 12–13.

**Thurmond, Strom**

*Ol' Strom: An Unauthorized Biography of Strom Thurmond.* Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson. Atlanta: Longstreet, 1999. 359 pp. $24.00.

"Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson, two journalists who grew up in South Carolina and have written extensively about Thurmond, have produced an engaging chronicle of his life and career, rich in human detail and political history. What is missing is Thurmond's voice. Strom Thurmond has so much to explain, so much to account for. But he isn't talking. He declined to be interviewed for this book."

Phil Gailey. *NYTBR,* Oct. 3, 1999: 18.

**Traill, Catharine Parr.** See **Moodie, Susanna.**

**Vidal, Gore**

*Gore Vidal: A Biography.* Fred Kaplan. New York: Doubleday, 1999. 850 pp. $35.00. Can$55.00.

"This biography is a companion to Kaplan's anthology *The Essential Gore*

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


*Vidal.* . . . [A reviewer of that work, Rex Murphy] rightly noted that Kaplan is a humourless and ponderous writer. After reading Vidal, many writers work more assiduously to make their own prose concise, witty, evocative and trenchant. Kaplan successfully resists all such temptation, but he does provide good service to a writer of great merit [in this authorized biography]. . . . It's a far better thing to read Vidal than to merely read about him: *Palimpsest* (1995), a brilliant memoir, makes this biography largely redundant."

T. F. Rigelhof. *Globe and Mail,* Nov. 20, 1998: D12.

"With luck Fred Kaplan's workmanlike biography will serve its first purpose of bringing new readers to a writer now in his 70s, but it cannot begin to convey the shock and delight of reading Gore Vidal. . . . The most intimate, rewarding section of this book is near its end, when biography blends into memoir and Kaplan describes with feeling his meetings with Vidal, their little jokes, their spats and reconciliations. In a friendship, Kaplan finds his natural subject. Whatever his biography's limitations, it leads us back, with insight, to the works of this audacious American master."

Regina Marler. *LATBR,* Nov. 7, 1999: 1–2.

"He [Vidal] fully cooperated with this biography, which at half the length would be twice as good. As with all biographies, the subject is only partly there. But Gore Vidal, nothing if not terse, might be more clearly depicted if his adulator had followed suit. Meanwhile, Kaplan's book is an invaluable font of research on the subject, possibly the only one we'll ever need."

Ned Rorem. *WP,* Dec. 6, 1999: 33.

**Viramma**

*Viramma: Life of an Untouchable.* Viramma, Josiane Racine, and Jean-Luc Racine. Trans. Will Hobson. UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. New York: Verso, 1997. 312 pp. $19.00.

"Viramma's story . . . is as close as we can come to the life of an illiterate woman in a Paraiyar [Pariah] community in Tamil Nadu. Viramma deals with nothing like the stories of those who have 'made it' or [James N.] Freeman's somewhat ridiculous Muli. She has no contact with the British or Muslims, she is very much a respected member within her own society, she has no part of any intellectual or Dalit or protest movement (although her menfolk do). She is colorful, highly intelligent, skilled in many traditional ways, a woman of great dignity who finds her place within the order of the hierarchy and of the village. She also seems to have the total recall of the illiterate, or of one who has lived through trauma."

Eleanor Zelliot. *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.3 (Aug. 1999): 885–86.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

## Virgil

*Virgil: His Life and Times.* Peter Levi. New York: St. Martin's, 1999. 248 pp. $27.95.

*Virgil's Experience: Nature and History; Times, Names, and Places.* Richard Jenkyns. Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford UP, 1999. 712 pp. $80.00.

"Two writers have recently taken the plunge and produced a single book on the whole range of Virgil's achievements, and one of them, Peter Levi's *Virgil: His Life and Times,* is of moderate length. It makes, however, a resounding claim. 'There is a pressing need,' he writes in his introduction, 'to restore Virgil's poetry to the true, unglamorised history of his own times, and to the poet's private life as far as we can know it, and the process of analysis of Virgil against the background of his own world is among the motives of this book.' The words 'unglamorised history' announce Levi's unenthusiastic view of Roman civilization; its imperial mission is dismissed as 'nasty heroics,' and as for the *Georgics,* Virgil's paean to Italian earth and the men who work it, Levi writes, 'What about the slaves? Horace owned at least a dozen and Virgil probably more. . . .' These phrases are typical of the book's almost conversational style, which descends at times to the colloquial and even lower to what might be described as 'folksy.' . . . Jenkyns's [book] could hardly be more different from Levi's. For one thing, it is almost three times as long. For another, it quotes the Latin text copiously, accompanying it always with a prose translation that he characterizes as 'literal rather than elegant'; it is carefully crafted so that anyone who has ever known any Latin, however little, should be able to feel the effect of Virgil's words and music. . . . The book is also a rare example of literary criticism of the highest quality, a major work presented with the clarity, elegance, and wit that readers of Jenkyns's other books have come to expect from him."

Bernard Knox. *NYRB,* Nov. 18, 1999: 60.

## Wagner, Richard

*Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art.* M. Owen Lee. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 102 pp. Can$12.95.

"In conveying the sweep of Wagner's imagination and the scope of his intellect, Lee goes back to Sophocles; moving forward with a crisp elucidation of Tannhäuser, he embraces Baudelaire, Proust, T. S. Eliot, Kandinsky and van Gogh. The conversational tone is invaluable to a listener who may not understand Wagner, but who finds his music impossibly, inexplicably moving."

Rose Norman. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 22, 2000: D14.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


**Watson, Jeannette**

*Bookstore: The Life and Times of Jeannette Watson and Books & Co.* Lynne Tillman. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999. 337 pp. $25.00.

"Jeannette Watson seemed to have everything it took to create both a financial and literary success out of Books & Company, the venerated independent bookstore on Madison Ave."

Diane Cole. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 22.

**Waugh, Evelyn**

*Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Life.* David Wykes. New York: St. Martin's, 1999. 224 pp. $39.95.

"Wykes's study is acute, perceptive, stylishly written and passionately appreciative of Waugh at his best. Wykes's best does not always coincide with mine, but he is so intelligently right so much of the time that it is exhilarating once or twice to think him wrong. . . . He accomplishes gracefully the link between the life and writing, a particularly close one."

Richard Eder. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 14.

**Wilde, Oscar**

*Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age.* Mary Warner Blanchard. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. 302 pp. $45.00.

"Blanchard has some interesting things to say about Wilde, particularly the extent to which he was received as an embodiment of masculinity in the Western states. . . . [The book] may well help to open up new lines of inquiry about the general popularity of aestheticism in the United States and the subsequent influence of this movement on modernist culture."

Paul Giles. *The American Historical Review* 104.5 (Dec. 1999): 1684–85.

**Wilder, Billy**

*Conversations With Wilder.* Cameron Crowe. New York: Knopf, 1999. 373 pp. $35.00.

" . . . 'Conversations with Wilder' is devoted to fascinating and detailed discussions of the work, with Crowe gamely playing the humble novice, asking how Wilder did this and that, and Wilder dispensing wise little jewels that add up to an inspired manual on how to write and direct a film."

Sarah Kerr. *NYTBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 8.

**Yeats, William Butler**

*Yeats's Ghosts: The Secret Life of W. B. Yeats.* Brenda Maddox. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 474 pp. $32.00. Can$46.50.

"It is the virtue of Brenda Maddox's book that to Yeats's capacities of

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Senator, politician and manager we may now add husband. But Maddox does not search the blatant 'oddness' of Yeats's otherworldly absorptions, which so consumed him after the marriage with Georgie [Hyde-Lees], for its relation with what is not odd at all: those moments in Yeats's poetry when he himself, in relation to certain aspects of the 20th century, seems to be the speaker from the other side."

Rex Murphy. *Globe and Mail,* Jan. 1, 2000: D16.

AND *The Life of William Butler Yeats: A Critical Biography.* Terence Brown. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999. 410 pp. $39.95.

" . . . Brown takes a . . . challenging road, following luminaries like A. N. Jeffares, Harold Bloom and Richard Ellmann (with whom he often disagrees) in trying to see the life and the work as part of the total pattern. . . . Brenda Maddox's book is a blithe, energetic, jolly debunking operation. It's called 'Yeats's Ghosts,' but it could have been called 'Yeats's Willy,' or 'Yeats was Silly.'"

Hermione Lee. *NYTBR,* Nov. 21, 1999: 9.

**Zhang Junmai**

*Democracy and Socialism in Republican China: The Politics of Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang), 1906–1941.* Roger B. Jeans, Jr. Baltimore: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998. 369 pp. $69.00 cloth, $23.95 paper.

"Zhang Junmai was an important Chinese intellectual in the first half of this century. His activities ranged from the fields of politics and scholarship to education and cultural criticism. . . . [Jeans's book] provides us with a detailed and thoughtful description of Zhang Junmai's thought and life. It is not only an excellent biography of an important intellectual and minority-party leader, but also a pioneering work on the third force between the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party in modern China. . . . It is very interesting to read in the contemporary context, in which social democrats in both America and Europe have come to power and are following their own 'third force way' as an alternative between the left and the right while Chinese intellectuals continue to hesitate between these two poles."

Wang Hui. *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.3 (Aug. 1999): 803–804.

## COLLECTIONS, GROUP BIOGRAPHIES, AND OTHER WORKS OF INTEREST

**African American Women**

*Doers of the Word: African American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830–1880).* Carla Peterson. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 257 pp. $38.00.

"This body of scholarship testifies that there are many more 'sides' to the multifaceted prism of nineteenth-century African American life than the

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


facile binaries of enslaved/free, Northern/Southern and male/female." This book is "a richly textured web of ten African American women orators and writers from the North whose words and experiences are integral to our ability to effectively imagine and understand African American culture."
Kimberly Wallace Sanders. *American Quarterly* 51.3 (Sept. 1999): 684–91.

**American Letters**

*Letters of the Century, America: 1900–1999.* Ed. Lisa Grunewald and Stephen J. Adler. New York: Dial, 1999. $35.00.

"Through more than 400 letters by correspondents both famous and unknown, Grunewald, a novelist, and Adler, an assistant managing editor at The Wall Street Journal, chronicle the trends and transformations of the past 100 years."

Diane Cole. *NYTBR,* Nov. 28, 1999: 21.

**Beat Generation**

*This Is the Beat Generation: New York—San Francisco—Paris.* James Campbell. London: Secker and Warburg, 1999. 320 pp. £16.99.

"Campbell combines biography with literary criticism and social history, and intersperses his narrative with snippets about the curiosities of Beat life. . . . If some of the output of the Beats has not aged well, their story remains fascinating, and here it is sympathetically, but unapologetically told."

David Horspool. *Guardian Weekly,* Dec. 16–22, 1999: 18.

**Encyclopedists**

*The Encyclopedists as a Group: A Collective Biography of the Authors of the "Encyclopedie."* Frank Kafker. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998. 222 pp. £50.00.

"Kafker argues that collective biography, though extremely valuable, is a much undervalued discipline. His attempt to provide just such a biography of the Encyclopedists has produced a fascinating study, which could also serve as an excellent introduction to the *Encyclopedie.*"

G. Gargett. *French Studies* 53.3 (1999): 335–36.

**Gay Latin American Writers**

*Eminent Moricones: Arenas, Lorca, Puig, and Me.* Jaime Manrique. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1999. 116 pp. $19.95.

" . . . he's far better—and his book más buenas—when the eminences he refers to are the idiosyncratic and memorable figures he himself knew, and whom he brings vividly alive elsewhere in this flawed but intentionally fascinating memoir."

Daniel Mendelsohn. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 38.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

**Irish Emigrants**

*The Great Shame and the Triumph of the Irish in the English Speaking World.* Thomas Keneally. New York: Doubleday. 712 pp. $35.00.

" . . . with its many characters and interlinked plots, 'The Great Shame' frequently resembles a 19th-century Russian novel. At times, however, the voice of the novelist overshadows the voice of the historian, and Keneally seems reluctant to go beyond the story and explore its fuller significance. The narrative is so sprawling that occasionally it becomes unwieldy. Yet the people Keneally has chosen to write about are so fascinating that the resolute reader will not fail to enjoy learning about them. 'The Great Shame' is an epic tale of courage and ingenuity."

Jay P. Dolan. *NYTBR,* Oct. 10, 1999: 20.

**Japanese Greats**

*Giants of Japan: The Lives of Japan's Greatest Men and Women.* Mark Weston. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1999. 377 pp. $32.00.

" . . . 'Giants of Japan's' worthiest contribution to understanding Japan is in its successful effort to personalize history, to offer a look at the passions and motivations of those who influenced this powerful nation. Anyone with an interest in Japan can enjoy it."

Doug Struck. *WP,* Sept. 27, 1999: 32–33.

**Japanese Women**

*Modern Girls, Shining Stars, the Skies of Tokyo: Five Japanese Women.* Phyllis Birnbaum. New York: Columbia UP, 1999. 240 pp. $24.95.

"This text presents five short biographies of twentieth-century Japanese women who, as the author tells us, are chosen as subjects because they 'did their best to stand up and cause more trouble than was considered proper in Japanese society.' The group includes two actresses (Takamine Hideko and Matsui Sumako), two writers (Uno Chiyo and Yanagiwara Byakuren), and one painter (Takamura Chieko). . . . Unfortunately, so little concrete evidence is provided that in the end the reader is left wondering about the veracity of all the material. . . . In sum, this book makes interesting, sometimes provocative reading, but it is not suitable for classroom or academic use. The essays are actually musings and the theses laid forth are not convincingly argued."

Susanna Fessler. *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.2 (May 1999): 509–510.

**Pacific Islanders**

*Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships.* David A. Chappell. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997. 231 pp. $27.95.

"The adventures of islanders on western ships began very early in the contact

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


history of the region, just a year after Magellan's short stay off Guam, when the *Trinidad* seized a Chamorro to provide sailing information on its return to the northern Marianas in 1522. . . . There would be thousands of Pacific Islanders who traveled abroad on western ships through the end of the nineteenth century—thirty thousand is the author's estimate. . . . *Double Ghosts* is a sampler of the adventures of these island-born travelers, a pastiche of dozens of vignettes or less—mere scraps of information—about the island men (and the occasional woman) who toured the world in western ships."

Francis X. Hezel, S.J. *Journal of World History* 10.2 (Fall 1999): 479–81.

**Reconstruction Presidents**

*The Reconstruction Presidents.* Brooks D. Simpson. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1998. 276 pp. $35.00.

"Simpson's slender monograph is an exhaustively researched, persuasively argued, and highly readable overview and assessment of how the four Reconstruction presidents responded to the complicated and controversial issues arising from the demise of slavery and the end of the Civil War. It deserves a large audience, both among historians and the general public."

Robert Tracy McKenzie. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (Mar. 2000): 204–05.

**Southern Ute Women**

*Southern Ute Women: Autonomy and Assimilation on the Reservation, 1887–1934.* Katherine M. B. Osburn. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1998. 165 pp. $45.00 cloth, $19.95 paperback.

"The 'assimilation' of the title refers not to the author's analytical perspective but to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) policy intended to change Southern Ute women's lives around the turn of the twentieth century. . . . She begins with a short historical context, while the remainder of the book is topical—changes in women's political participation, economic lives, domestic affairs, and marriage structures."

Martha C. Knack. *Pacific Historical Review* 68.4 (Nov. 1999): 673–75.

**Surrealists**

*Surreal Lives: The Surrealists, 1917–1945.* Ruth Brandon. New York: Grove, 1999. 527 pp. $32.50.

"'Surreal Lives,' Ruth Brandon's vivid group biography of the Paris-based congeries of avant-garde visual and literary artists between the wars, is—blind spots aside—fascinating, impassioned and, in the many themes it juggles, absorbingly complex. It is also opinionated, brutally on occasion, which contributes to its punch."

Mindy Aloff. *NYTBR,* Oct. 3, 1999: 26.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# LIFELINES

**Special Issue.** "Literature, Fame, and Notoriety." The first edition of *Critical Survey* to appear in 2001 will focus on literature, fame, and notoriety in the Victorian period. The editors invite contributions, of under 6,000 words, on any aspect of this area, including Victorian literary representations of famous figures; concepts of fame and infamy in the Victorian age; scandal and celebrity; processes of mythologization; or developments in life writing. Send completed papers to Simon Avery or Andrew Maunder, Department of Literature, University of Hertfordshire, Aldenham, Watford WD2 8AT, UK. Email inquiries to s.j.avery@herts.ac.uk or a.c.maunder@herts.ac.uk. **Deadline:** 1 Aug. 2000.

**Special Issue.** "Latin American Identity." For a special issue of *Post Identity* to be guest edited by Elaine Carey, papers are sought that problematize the retrogressive identity narratives that underline various Borderlands, Latin American, and Latino studies. A variety of theoretical perspectives are welcome, especially those that problematize narratives underlying essentialist conceptions of identity. Papers should be MLA format and between 2,000 and 8,000 words. The author's name and address should not appear on the manuscript but on an accompanying cover sheet. Send manuscripts in triplicate to Elaine Carey, Department of History, University of Detroit Mercy, 4001 West McNichols, P.O. Box 19900, Detroit, MI 48218-0900. Email inquiries to careyek@udmercy.edu. **Deadline:** 1 Sept. 2000.

**Essay Collection.** "Captivating Voices: Writings by Prisoners, Slaves, and Captives, 1789–1845." Volume editors Jason Haslam and Julia Wright are seeking papers that deal with texts written by those who were imprisoned, enslaved, transported, exiled, or otherwise confined through state-sanctioned dictates between 1789 and 1845. Possible topics include slave narratives, captivity narratives, narratives of imprisonment or transportation, narratives by guards or other officials related to the constraining institution, or narratives relating imprisonment and nascent sociopolitical organizations, such as abolitionist prison narratives. Send one copy of the completed paper to Jason Haslam and Julia Wright, Department of English, University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3GI. Email inquiries to jwhaslam@watarts.uwaterloo.ca or jmwright@watarts.uwaterloo.ca. **Deadline:** 1 Sept. 2000.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

**Conference Call.** "Revising Boundaries: Interdisciplinary Approaches to British Women Writers." Ninth Annual Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers Conference. March 15–17, 2001. Lawrence, Kansas. While scholarship on all aspects of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British women writers' work is welcome, the organizers especially encourage papers on recovering lost traditions, genres, writers, and texts; textual and technical issues in the recovery of women's texts; women in the publishing market, then and now; canon (re)formation; women writers in medicine, law, politics, religion, and the sciences; autobiography and travel writing; reconstructing female identity/ideology; teaching women writers' work in secondary and post-secondary schools; and gendered structures of knowledge. For further information, visit the conference web site at www.ukans.edu/~bwwc. Send 1–2 page abstracts or proposals for panels to BWWC, Department of English, 3116 Wescoe Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-2115. Email inquiries to bwwc@raven.cc.ukans.edu. **Deadline:** 15 Sept. 2000.

**Conference Call.** "Victorian Monuments." Australasian Victorian Studies Association Conference. 31 Jan.–4 Feb. 2001. University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. The 2001 conference offers the opportunity to explore Victorian monuments and memorials, both literal and metaphorical. While the visual arts and history are likely to be strongly represented, papers on literary or political topics will be valuable in extending the boundaries of the conference theme. Topics might include monumental figures, endeavors, and works, or cultural readings of the activity of commemoration. The keynote speaker will be Benedict Read, Leeds University. Send abstracts of papers to Meg Tasker or Michele McFarland, AVSA 2001 Conference, School of BSSH (Humanities), University of Ballarat, Victoria 3350, Australia. Email inquiries to m.tasker@ballarat.edu.au or m.mcfarland@ballarat.edu.au. **Deadline**: 15 Sept. 2000.

**Special Issue.** "Literature, Medicine, and Children." Guest editor Anne Hunsaker Hawkins invites essays for *Literature and Medicine* 21.1 on any text or literary activity that concerns children affected by illness, disability, or death. Possible subjects include fiction, drama, poetry, pathographies, or films about the suffering of children; writings by the children themselves; creative activities such as hospital-based children's theatre; and medical records and texts in the evolving culture of pediatric medicine. Manuscripts should be between 5,000 and 6,000 words of text. Authors' names should appear only on a cover sheet, and all identifiers in the text should be masked

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

so that the manuscripts can be reviewed anonymously. Submit manuscripts in triplicate to Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, Department of Humanities, The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, Box 850, Hershey, PA 17033. Email inquiries to ahh1@psu.edu. **Deadline**: 15 Jan. 2001.

**New Book Series.** "Willie Morris Books in Memoir and Biography." The University Press of Mississippi invites manuscripts for its new book series. Only previously unpublished memoirs and biographies told in narrative form are eligible; collections of essays, sketches, reflections, newspaper columns, and so on, are not. The editors are seeking memoirs that relate a unique, well-told story of an individual struggle evocative of a universal experience. A submitted biography must be a narrative about a person who deserves to be known, and whose life has touched history and has been shaped by significant human events. It must be expressively and carefully detailed, and intensely engaged with the subject's life. The manuscript must be between 85,000 and 95,000 words. An excerpt and an overview of the whole may be submitted. Address queries to Seetha Srinivasan, University Press of Mississippi, 3825 Ridgewood Road, Jackson, MS 39211-6492.

**New Release—a/b: Auto/Biography 14.1 (Spring 2000)** "Extremities: Memoirs at the Fin de Siècle," guest edited by Nancy K. Miller, contains her Introduction, and articles by Victoria Rosner, "Gender Degree Zero: Memoirs of Frozen Time in Antarctica"; Anne P. Rice, "Burning Connections: Maternal Betrayal in Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*"; Nancy K. Miller, "Memory Stains: Annie Ernaux's *Shame*"; Laura Frost, "After Lot's Daughters: Kathryn Harrison and the Making of Memory"; Jay Prosser, "Palinode on Photography and the Transsexual Real"; Michael Rothberg, "Between the Extreme and the Everyday: Ruth Kluger's Traumatic Realism"; Sandra M. Gilbert, "Writing Wrong"; and Anca Vlasopolos, "Texted Selves: Dorothy and William Wordsworth in the Grasmere Journals." For subscription information, contact managing editor Alex Vernon at acvernon @ email.unc.edu.

**Two from Lejeune.** *Recits de vies* XI (University of Paris X,1999), "Recits de vies et medias," is edited by Philippe Lejeune, and contains articles by Jean Hébrard, "Tenir un journal. L'Écriture personnelle et ses supports"; Philippe Lejeune, "Cher écran. Le journal sur ordinateur"; Philippe Artières, "Une vie en ligne. Des archives personnelles sur le Web"; Regine Robin, "Ma page Web. Home page papiers perdus"; Juliette Raabe, "Ma vie sur CD-ROM"; Claude Leroy, "Séries de vies: la vogue des biographies romancées dans les années 1920"; Marie-Françoise Canfrault-Duchet, "Adolf Wölfli, dessin et écriture du moi"; Claude Huber-Ganyaire, "Une

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

enfance illustrée: le *Journal* de Tomi Ungerer"; Jean-Pierre Mercier, "Autobiographie et bande dessinée"; Diane Watteau, "Moi, ou Moi? La fin de l'autoportrait"; Gilles Mora, "La Photobiographie: une form d'autobiographie?"; Francis Vanoye, "Dispositifs narcissiques: à propos du cinéma en France, aujourd'hui"; Jacques Lecarme, "-graphie?"; and Louisse Merzeau, "Médiologie et Moi."

Also *Genèses du "Je": Manuscrits et autobiographie.* Ed. Philippe Lejeune and Catherine Viollet. Paris: CNRS editions, 2000. Containing articles by Gérald Rannaud, "Littérature et vérité. Stendhal, la *Vie de Henry Brulard*"; Philippe Artières, "Écriture contrainte. Nouguier, les *Souvenirs d'un moineau*"; Claudine Raynaud, "Mary McCarthy, *Mémoires d'une jeune catholique*"; Marie-Françoise Lemonnier-Delpy, "*La Deltheillerie,* vannerie, mameillage et rapetassage"; Ruth Vogel, "*Montauk* de Max Frisch, réécritures et autocensure"; Catherine Viollet, "Violette Leduc, de *Ravages* à *La Bâtarde*"; Susanne Ditschler, "*La Mise en mots* d'Elsa Triolet"; Florence Bancaud-Maenen, "Le *Journal* de Kafka ou l'autobiographie fantôme"; Françoise Simonet-Tenant, "*Agnès* de Catherine Pozzi, une réécriture fusionnelle"; Barbara Klaw, "Simone de Beauvoir, du journal intime aux *Mémoires*"; Dominique Budor, "Les récits de naissance de Pirandello"; Martine Sagaert, "André Gide, du *Journal* à *Ainsi soit-il*"; and Philippe Lejeune, "Comment finissent les journaux."

## IABA-L DISCUSION LIST FOR LIFEWRITING

The International Auto/Biography Association, created in June 1999 at the International Conference on Auto/Biography held in Beijing, sponsors a discussion list about autobiography and biography. In addition to discussions of critical and theoretical issues, the list contains postings on upcoming conferences, calls for papers, new publications, and other matters of interest to students, scholars, and practitioners of lifewriting around the world. The organizing committee is composed of Alfred Hornung, Margaretta Jolly, Thomas R. Smith and Zhao Baisheng. The list moderator is Craig Howes, Center for Biographical Research, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. To subscribe to the list, send an email to

**listproc@hawaii.edu.**

Put nothing on the subject line of the message. On the first line of the message, type

**subscribe iaba-l firstname lastname.**

If you have any questions about subscribing, please contact Craig Howes, at biograph@hawaii.edu.

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Katherine Adams** (Review of Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography*) is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Bates College. She is currently writing a book about the political meanings generated by representations of privacy in nineteenth-century American life writing.

**Kathryn A. Becker** (Review of David Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories*) is a graduate student in Developmental Psychology at the University of Oregon, She conducts research on trauma, memory, and dissociation in children.

**Daniel Boamah-Wiafe** (Review of Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men: The W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures*) is Associate Professor of Black Studies and Geography at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His research interests include urban and economic development, race relations, black culture and leadership.

**Brigitte Cazelles** (Review of Catherine Mooney, *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*), Professor of French Literature at Stanford University, has published several books and articles on medieval didacticism, hagiography, and romance. She is currently preparing a study on noise and on its function in the formation of Western culture.

**Jennifer J. Freyd** (Review of David Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories*) is Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon. She is the author of *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Abuse* (Harvard UP, 1996).

**Lynda Goldstein** (Review of Erika Doss, *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith & Image*) teaches twentieth century American culture courses at Penn State University, Wilkes Barre.

**Ann D. Gordon** (Review of Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938*) is Associate Research Professor in the Department of History at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, and editor of *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (Rutgers UP, 1997).

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri 

**B. C. Harrison** (Review of Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*) teaches African American Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, where she is a doctoral candidate. She consults for Austin's SUMA Documentary Films and has developed permanent exhibits about the African Diaspora at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History.

**Evelyn J. Hawthorne** ("Self-Writing, Literary Traditions, and Post-Emancipation Identity: The Case of Mary Seacole") is Associate Professor of English at Howard University, and teaches in her specialities of Caribbean literature and women's literature. Hawthorne received her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Minnesota.

**Wendy S. Hesford** (Review of Martha Watson, *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists*) is Assistant Professor of English at Indiana University. Her book *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy* appeared in 1999 from the University of Minnesota Press. *Haunting Reflections: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the "Real,"* a collection edited with Wendy Kozol, is forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press.

**Michael Keren** ("Biography and Historiography: The Case of David Ben-Gurion") is Professor of Political Science at Tel-Aviv University. His most recent book, a biography of Israel's foremost civil rights lawyer, *Amnon Zichroni: peraklit aher* [Amnon Zichroni: A Different Lawyer] (Hed-Artzi, 1999), illuminates the history of the State of Israel from the unique perspective of civil society.

**Barbara Klaw** (Review of Jo-Ann Pilardi, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography*), Associate Professor of French at Northern Kentucky University, is the author of *Le Paris de Beauvoir/ Beauvoir's Paris* (Paris: Syllepse, 1999) and numerous essays concerning Beauvoir's novels, autobiographical volumes, philosophy, letters, and journals. She is currently preparing an analysis and a two-volume annotated English translation of Beauvoir's unpublished diaries from 1926–1930.

**Teresa Mangum** (Review of Barbara Frey Waxman, *To Live at the Center of the Moment: Literary Autobiographies of Aging*) is Associate Professor of English at the University of Iowa. Her recent publications include "Little

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri


Women: The Aging Female Character in Nineteenth-Century British Children's Literature," in the Kathleen Woodward edited collection *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (Indiana UP, reviewed in *Biography* 22.4), and "Passages of Life: Growing Old" in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture,* edited by Herbert F. Tucker (Blackwell 1999).

**S. Leigh Matthews** ("'The Bright Bone of a Dream': Drama, Performativity, Ritual, and Community in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*") is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Calgary English Department where she specializes in nineteenth- and pre-1950s twentieth-century Canadian literature and theories of life writing. She is currently researching and writing her dissertation, to be titled *Self(s) Surveyed: Intersections of Identity in Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs.*

**Hephzibah Roskelly** (Review of Michael Erben, *Biography and Education: A Reader*) teaches courses in rhetoric and composition, women's studies and American literature at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She has just completed a book on the uses of groups in the classroom, *Breaking (Into) the Circle: Group Work for Gender and Racial Equity* (Calendar Islands Press 2000).

**Linda V. Troost** (Review of Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*), Associate Professor of English at Washington and Jefferson College, has written essays on English music comedy in the eighteenth century, and with Sayre Greenfield edited *Jane Austen in Hollywood* (U of Kentucky P, 1998). She is also the founding editor of the new AMS annual *Eighteenth-Century Women.*

079061

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

CC-0. In Public Domain. Gurukul Kangri Collection, Haridwar